

The Role and Image of the Ascendancy in the Irish Theatre, 1600-1900

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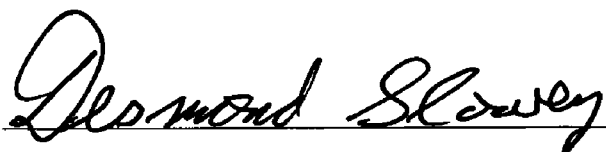
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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Ph. D. in Humanities, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my own work.

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Contents

Chapter	Page
Introduction	1
I: Enter the Gentry	18
The First Stage-Irish Aristocrat: Macmorrice in <i>Henry V</i> ; the First Play: <i>Gorboduc</i> , Dublin Castle, Sept. 7 th . 1601; the First Theatre in Ireland: Werburgh St. 1634; the plays of James Shirley	
II: Restoration	63
Comedy and Tragedy; Restoration Theatre in Dublin; Katherine Philips' <i>Pompey</i> ; Orrery's <i>The Generall</i> ; the first Duke of Ormond; John Dancer's <i>Nicomede</i> ; publication of plays; Michelburne's <i>Siege of Derry</i> .	
III: The Generous and the Mercenary; or, The Qualities of the Quality	106
William Philips' <i>St. Stephen's Green</i> ; George Farquhar's <i>Love and a Bottle</i>	
IV: 'The Reigning Follies of this Spacious Town': Charles Shadwell's Irish Comedies	148
The bourgeois audience; Charles Shadwell and the rise of the 'Bourgeois Ascendancy'; <i>The Sham Prince</i> , <i>The Hasty Marriage</i> , <i>Irish Hospitality</i>	
V: Cultural Colonisation: Summoning 'Hibernia'	203
Shadwell's <i>Rotherick O'Connor</i> ; Philips' <i>Hibernia Freed</i> ; Dobbs' <i>The Patriot Chief</i> ; Howard's <i>The Siege of Tamor</i> ; Ashton's <i>The Battle of Aughrim</i>	
VI: The Humours of 'Hibernia'	248
The Gentlemen's Quarrel; Thomas Sheridan's <i>Captain O'Blunder</i> ; Richard Cumberland's <i>Major O'Flaherty</i> ; Charles Macklin's <i>Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan & Murrough O'Dogherty</i> ; Richard Brinsley Sheridan's <i>Sir Lucius O'Trigger & Lieutenant O'Connor</i>	
VII: Radical Shifts	303
John O'Keeffe's <i>Revolutionary Spirit</i> ; Sheridan Knowles' 'Liberty' Plays	
VIII: Picturesque Ruins: Boucicault's Irish Ascendancy	357
<i>The Colleen Bawn</i> ; <i>Arrah-na-Pogue</i> ; <i>The Shaughraun</i> ; <i>Robert Emmet</i>	
IX: 'Opening the Future': The Politicisation of Irish Melodrama	395
Boucicault: <i>Robert Emmet</i> , <i>The O'Dowd</i> , <i>The Fireside Story of Ireland</i> ; Melodrama at the Queen's: J.W. Whitbread, P.J. Bourke, Edmund Falconer, Hubert O'Grady	
Conclusion	441
Bibliography	462

Desmond Slowey: The Role and Image of the Ascendancy in the Irish Theatre, 1600-1900

The Irish theatre from 1601 to c.1900 was bound intimately to the society that produced it. Started by the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, it grew and changed with it, reflecting its preoccupations and prejudices, while seeking at the same time to forge its conscience and urge it towards personal and communal transformation.

The theatre mirrors the development of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy; the overall image it presents shifts as the Ascendancy mutates, its power deteriorates, and the view of the playwrights becomes more questioning, indifferent or hostile.

From exalting Ascendancy virtues (Shirley and Orrery), it moves to express the views of the 'bourgeois Ascendancy' (Shadwell and Philips), then to a more questioning and radical view, (Knowles and O'Keeffe). Nationalist dramatists take a more critical stance, and the portrayal of the Ascendancy becomes more equivocal and marginal in Boucicault and Whitbread, until eliminated almost completely in the theatre of P.J. Bourke.

This was a political theatre, involved continuously in self-definition, personal and societal. The plays and their authors were modelling moral and social formation for a divided country. The 'generous lovers' of Philips, the 'mercenary' *bourgeoises* of Shadwell, the rowdy mongrel gentlemen of Macklin and Sheridan, O'Keeffe's subtle jacobinism, Boucicault's imagined aristocracy, and the aspirational exemplars of the Nationalist Melodrama, all display the urge to transformation that is endemic in the early Irish theatre.

Within this larger pattern, certain themes recur: the appropriation of the English language by the Irish and the colonization of Irish culture by the English, the importance of women as the agents of change, the displacement of a dominant class by an aggressive lower class, and the change by the Anglo-Irish in their perception of ancient Ireland, from a savage wilderness infested with barbarians, to a cultured civilization set in a Romantic landscape.

Introduction

Introduction

1

In this thesis I propose to investigate the role and image of the Ascendancy in the development of Irish drama from c. 1600 to c. 1900.

Role and image:

Role has a double meaning. First, it denotes the physical and active participation of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in creating, promoting, writing, acting, directing, presenting, and receiving the Irish theatre. Secondly, it signals the way in which they portray themselves and are portrayed in that theatre. This second meaning interacts with the idea of 'image' – the way in which they copied their lives to the stage and copied the stage in their lives, how they portrayed themselves as loyal Englishmen or equivocal patriots, for example, and also how they played out in their real lives the examples that the stage had given them. A persistent motif of 'play-acting' runs right through Anglo-Irish drama; from the seventeenth century down to the plays of Lennox Robinson a recurrent theme is of Anglo-Irish civilization as a theatrical performance. To Daniel Corkery, the outsider, it was 'a tragi-comic side-show'.¹ Maria Edgeworth, on the inside, speaks of her characters also in theatrical terms:

After we have beheld splendid characters playing their parts on the great theatre of the world, with all the advantages of stage effect and decoration, we anxiously beg to be admitted behind the scenes, that we may take a nearer view of the actors and actresses.²

¹ Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1925), p. 30.

² Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 3.

The Irish Theatre:

While the date of 1601 is usually given as the beginning of theatre in Ireland, with the production at Dublin Castle of *Gorboduc*, there was certainly drama in the country before that. Drama was part of the European cultural matrix imported by the Normans, and mediaeval morality and nativity plays are known from Kilkenny and Dublin, as are Church plays in Latin. The accepted idea that the Normans became more Irish than the Irish themselves is not correct. They retained the greater part of the culture they imported – feudalism and primogeniture, for example – though adopting the Irish language and the ways of their neighbours.

The theatrical activities of the guilds in Dublin are well documented,³ but this is within the sphere of English influence. 'There was no Irish theatre, and no open-air acting', wrote P.W. Joyce in 1903.⁴ This long-standing idea that there was no drama in Gaelic Ireland has been overturned. Fletcher's *Drama, Performance, and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (2000) considers 'Drama [...] as a continuum in which theatricality and performance is subsumed',⁵ and excavates a formidable range of performers – poets, story-tellers, harpers, jesters, clowns, jugglers, and farters⁶ – and performances, public and private – at banquets and at fairs. Some of these activities were covered by the word *cluichí*, which may be translated as 'plays'. The idea that Gaelic culture favoured the individual performer exclusively is supported, if not created, by Derricke's illustration of an Irish bard performing for a chief, accompanied by a harper.⁷ But this is not a solo: at least two performers are involved. The Bardic schools were inflexibly conservative

³ Alan J. Fletcher, *Drama, Polity, and Performance in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (Cork: University Press, 2000), Chapter II, pp. 61-125.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵*Ibid.*, p.5.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 12-27: *Fochloc, senchaid, cruittire, fuirseoir, druth, cleasamnach, braigetóir.*

⁷John Derricke's 'Image of Irlande' in Christopher Fitz-Simon, *The Irish Theatre* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), p. 8.

institutions, but most of the familiar texts that have survived are trial pieces by the students, called *óglachas*, and often break into dialogue; *Agallamh na Seanórach* is a prime example. And while the purists may insist that the one person played both parts and the narration, it surely occurred to some rebel at the Bardic schools to try it out with different people speaking the parts.

The memoirs of the first Marquis of Clanricarde published in 1722, support this argument. Clanricarde gives an intriguing account of the workings of the Bardic schools, which were, according to Daniel Corkery, the equivalent of the university system of the nation, bestowing degrees on their students and privileges on their teachers. Clanricarde describes how the *filí* were given a theme, and then lay in the darkness of their room and worked on it for a whole day before presenting it to their masters. The last part of the process was the presentation of the poem to its patron, not by its composer, but by a troupe of bards under his direction:

With a great deal of Ceremony in a Consort of Vocal and Instrumental Musick. [...] The poet himself said nothing, but directed and took care that everybody else did his Part right. The Bards having first had the Composition from him, got it well by Heart, and now pronounc'd it orderly, keeping even pace with a Harp, touch'd upon that Occasion; no other musical Instrument being allowed for the said Purpose than this alone, as being Masculin, much sweeter and fuller than any other.⁸

This would suggest that the introduction of secular, vernacular drama in English had fertile soil to fall on, even though it was centred in the seventeenth century on Dublin Castle, and used by those in power to reflect their society and to create and forge an identity for themselves.

⁸Corkery, p. 67.

The Ascendancy:

Not all the Anglo-Irish belonged to the upper-classes. In Dublin there were tradesmen, place-seekers, hangers-on. Richard Head's play, *Hic et Ubique* (1663) shows us this lower stratum in action. James Shirley deals with the tension between the military men who ruled from the Castle and the tradespeople who lived off them in *The Doubtful Heir* (1637). The Plantations attracted an amount of riff-raff into the country, according to Stewart, a contemporary Divine:

From Scotland came many, and from England not a few, yet all of them generally the scum of both nations, who from debt, or breaking or fleeing from justice, or seeking shelter, came hither, hoping to be without fear of man's justice, in a land where there was little as yet, of the fear of God [...] Going to Ireland was looked on as a miserable mark of a deplorable person; yea, it was turned into a proverb, and one of the worst expressions of disdain that could be invented was to tell a man that "Ireland would be his hinder end."⁹

A lot of those who took land in the hope of rapidly amassing a fortune soon became disillusioned and moved out, but those who stayed and consolidated their positions and holdings evolved into the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. But other strands persisted – squireens, tradesmen, shopkeepers, soldiers, adventurers, writers, clergymen and layabouts. Many of the writers come from these strata, and though they cannot properly be considered as members of the Ascendancy, they have something useful to say about their lords and masters.

⁹James Seaton Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland: comprising the civil history of the province of Ulster, from the accession of James the First: with a preliminary sketch of the progress of the reformed religion in Ireland during the sixteenth century and an appendix, consisting of original papers.* (London: Whittaker, 1853), I, p. 97.

But the image, portrayed prominently in the plays of the period, is seldom of these lower echelons, but comes almost unfailingly from the upper crust of this society. Others may be used as foils, to throw them into relief, and many of the playwrights may be looking up at them from below – Farquhar in *Love and a Bottle*, Philips in *St. Stephen's Green* – but there is no doubt that this theatre exists for and about the Ascendancy; this is their stage to strut and fret an hour. The Irish theatre consisted, until the middle of the nineteenth century, of the Anglo-Irish talking to themselves. Most of the talking was done by, and most of the talking was done about, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.

The Ascendancy comprised, according to the chronicler of their decline, Mark Bence-Jones, 'the lords and landowners of Ireland, known, together with their relations, as the Ascendancy long after they had ceased to be in the ascendant'.¹⁰ *Burke's Irish Family Records* categorizes the Landed Gentry as 'Irish families which do not have hereditary peerages or baronetcies, but who were in possession of estates of not less than 1,000 acres'.¹¹ The landed Gentry formed the backbone of the Ascendancy, but along with them we have to include the Anglo-Irish military, clerical, professional and administrative strata, many of whom stemmed from the landed families and partook prominently in the running of the country.

I use the term 'Ascendancy' to refer to the Protestant rulers of Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was the ruling class that achieved total control of the country after the triumph of William of Orange in 1690. Lecky, in his *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, looks at the state of the country at the end of the seventeenth century and concludes:

¹⁰ Mark Bence-Jones, *The Twilight of the Ascendancy* (London: Constable, 1987), p. xv.

¹¹ *Burke's Irish Family Records* (London: Burke's Peerage, 1979), p. viii.

The disaster of the Boyne and the surrender of Limerick destroyed the last hopes of the Catholics. They secured, as they vainly imagined, by the Treaty of Limerick, their religious liberty; but the bulk of the Catholic army passed into the service of France, and the great confiscations that followed the Revolution completed the ruin of the old race. When the eighteenth century dawned, the great majority of the former leaders of the people were either sunk in abject poverty or scattered as exiles over Europe; the last spasm of resistance ceased, and the long period of unbroken Protestant ascendancy had begun.¹²

W.J. McCormack points out that during the nineteenth century, "Ascendancy" gradually came to act in Hiberno-English debate many of the roles attributed to aristocracy in England'.¹³ Though I use the term in my analysis of the eighteenth, and even of the seventeenth century as a synonym for the more widespread 'nobility and gentry', I do so retrospectively. 'Protestant ascendancy' only emerged as a popular shibboleth in the late eighteenth century in response to Catholic demands for the removal of the Penal laws. Initially it referred to the principle and apparatus of Anglo-Irish domination over the Irish Catholic majority, but it was a new name for an old reality – 'New *ascendancy* is the old mastership', Edmund Burke declared.¹⁴ Richard Sheridan described what he understood by the term to the Irish Parliament in 1792:

A Protestant king, to whom only being Protestant we owed allegiance; a Protestant house of peers, composed of Protestant Lords spiritual in Protestant succession, of Protestant lords temporal, with Protestant inheritance, and a Protestant house of commons, elected and deputed by Protestant constituents; in short a Protestant legislative, a Protestant judicial, and a Protestant executive, in all and each of their varieties, degrees, and gradations.¹⁵

Gradually, however, personnel replaced principle, and

¹² W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 3 vols (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), I, p.134.

¹³ W.J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789 to 1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.78.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 77.

A Protestant élite [...] assumes the identity of the Ascendancy, thereby gradually arrogating to itself the status of a raffish aristocracy and the security of a restricted bourgeoisie from which Catholics will be rebuffed by a flamboyant sectarianism devoid of Christianity.¹⁶

‘The Anglo-Irish, if they had a history, lived it in the eighteenth century,’ according to Terence de Vere White.¹⁷ Their civilization glittered considerably on the surface, but its sectarian nature left a fatal flaw at its centre, as Sean Ó Faoláin points out:

They were to bring to Ireland a greater concentration of civil gifts than any previous, or later, colonisers: one may, indeed, be done with it in one sentence by saying that culturally speaking the Anglo-Irish created modern Ireland. [...] The heyday of this Anglo-Irish enclave was the eighteenth century; their nearest-to-hand monument is Dublin’s grace, roominess, magnificence and unique atmosphere; but all about the country they built gracious houses [...] which are the epitome of the classical spirit of that cultured and callous century. They were, however, a separate enclave. They resided in Ireland. It was their country, never their nation. [...] One of the most cultivated and creative societies in western Europe during the eighteenth century was also politically barbarous.¹⁸

The overt decline of Anglo-Ireland began with the Act of Union, and the social and fiscal undermining led to its apparently precipitous collapse when Gladstone and his successors stripped the Ascendancy of its land in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was land that set them up; it was the land they depended on, and it was the loss of that land that pulled them down. Without their estates, the Ascendancy withered and died. That ‘noisy side-show, so bizarre in its lineaments, and so tragi-comic in its fate,’¹⁹ as Daniel Corkery observed, ground to a sad and pathetic curtain.

¹⁶ *Ibid* p.92.

¹⁷ Terence de Vere White, *The Anglo-Irish* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1972), p. 13.

¹⁸ Sean O’Faoláin, *The Irish* (West Drayton, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1947), p. 87.

¹⁹ Corkery, p. x.

Irish or Anglo-Irish? :

‘Anglo-Irish’ is the usual term of description, but the Irish is by far the more potent part of the duality; from the early eighteenth century, the colonists never considered they needed a hyphen to be Irish. The term Anglo-Irish arose from the antipathies within the Gaelic revival of the nineteenth century. The democratic tendency redefined the idea of Irishness as Gaelic, in order to diminish the claims of the aristocratic strain. One of the Beresfords noted ruefully: ‘When I was a boy, “the Irish people” meant the Protestants; now it means the Roman Catholics.’²⁰

Irish writers in England are always aware of a distance between themselves and the sphere in which they moved. The Irish Drama charts the opening of that gap. The physical distance and separation of the two islands was its basis, but the mental separation that resulted was gradual and painful for the colonial mind. As the Duke of Wellington is supposed to have remarked: to be born in a stable does not make one a horse. His remark is significant in that it draws our attention to the main signifier of nationality at the time – birth or blood. The literature is full of people who are well-born, who are proud of their blood. But to be well-born is not to be well-bred, as Maria Edgeworth set out to demonstrate in her novel, *Ennui*. Breeding has changed its meaning since the eighteenth century, where it refers to rearing and education, not to birth. ‘There is no distinction which we are or indeed ought to be fonder of than that of Englishmen,’²¹ Thomas Prior, the founder of the Royal Dublin Society, wrote in 1771, and yet he was conscious of himself ‘as a native of Ireland, and have my whole fortune

²⁰ JC Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* (London; Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 10.

²¹ de Vere White, p. 63.

settled here.’²² He sees himself as an Englishman, of English blood, but born, bred, living and dying in Ireland. Location does not decide nationality. ‘The Anglo-Irish soon came’, writes J.C. Beckett, ‘to regard Ireland as their country and to develop a sense of corporate identity. They were, to use their own language, “the English of Ireland,” “the English nation of this land.”’²³

The colonists may have considered themselves impeccably English and part of the old country, but the old country did not hold the same view. The experience of the colonists in both America and Ireland was almost identical. The country in which they lived was not *their* country. They were expected to put the good of the mother country before their own good, especially in material matters, relating to trade and manufacturing, while at the same time they were considered to be less than those citizens of the homeland, their accents laughed at, their pretensions mocked. Prior laments:

And yet, it cannot but seem hard to be us'd and consider'd as aliens by those who [...] persuaded numbers of our people [...] to come over hither and spend their blood in their service to extend their Empire, Commerce and Power, and may not the children of those Englishmen who have planted in our colonies in America be as justly reckoned Indians and savages as such families who are settled here be considered and treated as mere Irishmen and aliens?²⁴

Protestant patriots regarded the native Irish as having no part to play in any political activity, which was carried on between themselves and London. This attitude goes right back to Swift, who could see clearly enough the horrible conditions of the native inhabitants, but saw no involvement for them in the solution of their own problems. In

²² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²³ JC Beckett, p. 24.

²⁴ de Vere White, p. 63.

the late nineteenth century, Standish James O'Grady, the father of the Literary Revival, berates the Ascendancy at large for their apathy and failure to take their rightful place at the head of the entire nation:

For consider, the weakness of a ruling class [...] is neglect of duties and responsibilities, love of pleasure, sport, and ease, lack of union and public spirit, selfishness, stupidity, and poltroonery. These weaknesses, you see, are moral. [...] But as an aristocracy, as a class of men owning the soil of Ireland, and gathering the rents of Ireland, strict Justice, weighing your merits in the scales against your demerits, sees the last go down like lead and the former, starting up like a rocket, kick the beam.²⁵

O'Grady was not content simply to castigate; he had a vision for the rejuvenation of the aristocracy. He urged the Ascendancy leaders to 'reshape themselves in a heroic mould',²⁶ so that they might once again become the real leaders of Ireland. Unless this happened, he prophesied anarchy and civil war 'which might end in a shabby, sordid Irish Republic',²⁷ ruled by corrupt politicians and the ignoble rich.

This was the obverse side of the Literary Revival, an attempt by Ascendancy Ireland to re-assume dominance of the emerging nation, but the rising Catholic middle-class - 'an ungodly ruck of fat-faced, sweaty-headed swine', according to Synge²⁸ - had no intention of allowing any Ascendancy counter-revolution, and took over the Literary Movement, the Abbey Theatre, and eventually, the State. In doing so, the Irish bourgeoisie was finalising the undermining process they had been engaged in for over a century.

²⁵Standish James O'Grady, 'Toryism and Irish Democracy', *Selected Essays and Passages*, ed. by Emmet A. Boyd (Dublin: The Talbot Press, n.d.), p. 202 & 203.

²⁶Bence-Jones, p. 83.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁸Ann Saddlemyer, 'The Mature Yeats,' in *Irish Renaissance*, ed. by Robin Skelton and David R. Clark (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1965), p. 74.

Methodology:

Overall I will argue that Irish plays from 1600 to 1900 form a coherent body of work, that patterns, themes and concerns run through the centuries and build to a comprehensive portrait of the ideas and attitudes of the Irish Ascendancy, and attitudes to them; that the strands can be seen interacting and synthesising in the works of Irish playwrights, and that the plays seek, not just to reflect but to forge the national consciousness.

I do not intend to deliver a detailed literary criticism of the plays I will study, though some commentary is inevitable. They are an uneven bunch, ranging from the genius of Sheridan or Farquhar to the mediocrity of Shadwell or Whitbread; there are no undiscovered masterpieces but there is a good deal of solid work, both literary and dramatic. Nor do I intend to deal with the totality of any playwright's work, but to confine myself to their plays that deal with Ireland, Irish characters or Irish issues.

The main focus of study will be the plays themselves from which I will try to extract and formulate patterns of thinking, areas of personal or class concern, ideas of station and rule, and reaction to known events, such as the Restoration of Charles II. I will argue that the early Irish drama was a mirror to the lives of the Ascendancy: it grew out of their lives and fed back into them by holding up exemplars, reflecting and reinforcing their prejudices, depicting their lives and stimulating change in a closed society.

The approach I will take will be in the nature of Marxist analysis, in that I employ a dialectic in which the overall arch of the thesis traces the Ascendancy influence from dominance of the theatre to disappearance. But dialectic also informs the changes within

the structure – it provides a pattern whereby established orthodoxies come under interrogation, and oppositions and tensions combat and fuse, as in the work of Macklin, before coming into question again, as in the writings of O'Keeffe and Knowles. Though the Ascendancy seems to be in an unassailable position, the playwrights were constantly questioning, subverting and eroding it. There is a clear pattern in the plays of a steady drip of capital, power and influence from the Ascendancy to the lower classes, especially in the period following the French Revolution. George Lukács points out: 'The dialectical method is concerned always with [...] knowledge of the historical process in its entirety'.²⁹ This has led me, on occasion, to look away from the plays themselves and see them in a broad cultural and historical perspective. This is a literary study, but it is not desirable to excise any work of literature from its period or its society, if it can be avoided. All drama is ultimately political, providing a two-way illumination: the plays illustrate the society, and the background lights up the plays.

With the coming of the Literary Theatre in the 1890s, a new era began in the Irish theatre, with the literary taking precedence over the theatrical. The great problem with nineteenth-century theatre, Michael Booth writes, was that it became separate from literature, and pursued a path of spectacle and sensation.³⁰ The result was that when serious writers tried to write for it, they lacked the necessary theatrical skills and their plays failed. The 'Little Theatre' movement was an attempt to reverse this trend, and to strive again for literary excellence. There is not a clean break between the old and the new, but this New Testament falls outside the scope of this study. My interest is in the Old Testament of the Irish theatre, starting with *Gorboduc* in 1601, and ending with the Irish Nationalist Melodramas of the late nineteenth century.

²⁹ W.J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition*, p. 2, n. 2.

³⁰ Michael Booth, ed., Introduction to Volume I, *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-1976), I, p. 10.

Review of Literature:

The standard work on the Anglo-Irish is Lecky's *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (1892-1913). Other useful works I have consulted are Terence de Vere White's acerbic *The Anglo-Irish* (1972), J.C. Beckett's *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* (1976) which is more or less an apologia for the class, and Mark Bence-Jones' *The Twilight of the Ascendancy* (1987), which also throws a kindly light. Daniel Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland* (1925) argues for a complete separation of the two traditions, Gaelic and Anglo-Irish in eighteenth-century Ireland, while Sean O'Faolain's *The Irish* (1947) locates the Anglo-Irish within an overall portrait of the development of the modern Irish nation. Two informative historical works were Maurice Craig's *The Volunteer Earl* (1948) and Constantia Maxwell's *Dublin under the Georges* (1936). Edward McLysaght's *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century* (1969) goes some way towards imposing some order on a chaotic era, and Vivian Mercier's idiosyncratic *The Irish Comic Tradition* (1962) is always worth dipping into.

W.J. McCormack's *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789 to 1939* (1985) explores how the rhetoric and myth of Ascendancy develops in the historic and literary record, and follows their tracks from Burke to Beckett. Nicholas Grene's *The Politics of Irish Drama* (1999) is concerned with how the image of Ireland is projected on stage – 'the self-conscious stage representation of Ireland [...] and the politics of such representation'.³¹ Only on Boucicault does his work overlap this thesis.

³¹Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999), p.2.

In theatrical matters, there are five veteran surveys. The ground was broken and the foundations laid by Andrew E. Malone's *The Irish Drama* (1929). La Tourette Stockwell's *Dublin Theatres and Theatre Customs, 1637-1820* (1938) takes a detailed and comprehensive look at that period, and quotes extensively from primary contemporary sources. Peter Kavanagh's *The Irish Theatre* (1946) follows Stockwell to a great extent, taking a nationalistic point of view, and is interested only in the literary quality of the plays. G.C. Duggan divides his exhaustive *The Stage Irishman* (1937) into two sections, plays written in English on Irish subjects, and a study of the Irishman in 'British' drama, in all his many manifestations. He is inclined to look askance at most of the manifestations of the Irishman on stage, and dismisses most of the plays under discussion as worthless. W.S. Clark's *The Early Irish Stage* (1955) traces the development from the beginnings until 1720, formalising the extensive groundwork done by J.W. Lawrence. Clark also draws on Lawrence's notebooks in *The Irish Stage in the County Towns* (1965) to show that the repertoire followed mostly, but not exclusively, the Dublin trends.

To these has recently been added Christopher Fitzsimon's *The Irish Theatre* (1983) which presents a useful and informative overall view, Christopher Morash's *A History of the Irish Theatre 1601-2000* (2002) which gives a comprehensive and lively view of the entire period. John C. Greene and Gladys L.H. Clark's *The Dublin Stage, 1720-1745: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, and Afterpieces* (2000) trawls through Dublin newspapers of the time and lists all the stage entertainments provided in the city. Christopher Fitz-Simon and Christopher O'Connell have documented and analysed Irish plays from the turn of the twentieth century in 'Popular Irish Drama in the decade leading up to the opening of the Abbey Theatre' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ulster at Coleraine, 2003).

I have consulted many more specialised works, such as Christopher J Wheatley's *"Beneath Ierne's Banners:" Irish Protestant Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (1999) looks at the separatist tendencies evident in selected plays of the time, but avoids considering any plays by Catholic writers. Helen M. Burke's *Riotous Assemblies* (2003) evaluates the theatrical disturbances that bedevilled the eighteenth-century Irish theatre and teases out the complex of religious, political and social currents that fed into them. Seamus de Búrca's *The Queen's Royal Theatre* (1983) serves to highlight how little work has been done on the later nineteenth-century Irish theatre, eclipsed as it was by the success of the Abbey.

Some editions of plays have proved invaluable. W.S Clark's edition of the works of Roger Boyle, first Earl of Orrery (1937), furnished not just the plays themselves, but also a useful introduction to the man and his work. Cheryl Herr's volume of late nineteenth century Irish political melodramas, *For the Land they Loved* (1991) provided material not available elsewhere, as did Wheatley and Donovan's recent edition of *Irish Plays of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (2003), and Christopher Murray's edition of William Philips' *St. Stephen's Green* (1979). Frederick M. Link's edition of the plays of John O'Keeffe (1981), and J.O. Bartley's of *Four Comedies* by Charles Macklin (1968) supplied biographical and critical material.

Articles in the periodical *Eighteenth Century Ireland* proved useful. In particular Kevin Whelan's 'An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland' (1995), and two pieces on the eighteenth-century Ascendancy: W.J. McCormack's 'Eighteenth-Century Ascendancy: Yeats and the Historians' (1989) and James Kelly's 'Eighteenth-Century Ascendancy: A Commentary' (1990). *Eire-Ireland* provided some

material on the later nineteenth-century drama. Malcolm James Nelson ranges extensively over many obscure plays in his 'From Rory and Paddy to Boucicault's Myles, Shaun and Conn: The Irishman on the London Stage, 1830-1860' (Fall 1978) and Sven Eric Molin and Robin Goodfellowe's, 'Nationalism on the Dublin Stage' (Spring 1986) considers the nationalist sympathies displayed by Boucicault and Whitbread. The best work on this has been done by Stephen M. Watt in his 'Boucicault and Whitbread: The Dublin Stage at the End of the Nineteenth Century', *Eire-Ireland* (1995), which he expands on in the recently published *The Cambridge Guide to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, (2004), ed. by Shaun Richards.

Online sources proved valuable in supplying occasional information about events or writers, and sometimes the texts of plays that are no longer available anywhere else, such as John Dancer's *Nicomede* (1671) at Early English Books Online <<http://www.lib.umi.com/eebo>>. One website that was particularly useful was <www.pgileirdata.org>, a dataset maintained by the Princess Grace Library of Monaco, which holds an extensive database on all Irish writers.

While nearly all the plays of the early period are, by default, plays for, about and by the Anglo-Irish, and most of them for and about the Ascendancy clustered around Dublin Castle, there is not to my knowledge any study of the corpus of Irish playwrighting to investigate how they saw themselves, their relationship with each other and the rest of the island, or how they were seen by the other inhabitants. I believe that this study will yield valuable insights into the nexus of play, playwright and audience, provide some insight into the structure, texture and merits of the plays themselves, throw some new light on Ascendancy thinking, and highlight changing patterns of attitudes to the Ruling Class during the three hundred years from 1600 to 1900.

Chapter I

Enter the Gentry

The first Stage-Irish aristocrat: Macmorrice in *Henry V*; the first play: *Gorboduc*, Dublin Castle, Sept. 7th. 1601; the first theatre in Ireland: Werburgh Street, 1634; the plays of James Shirley; Burnell's *Landgartha*.

The English colonists of the sixteenth century regarded the Irish as an inferior race, hardly more than animals, and to be treated as such. In 1585, Andrew Trollope wrote to Walsingham that the Irish were 'not thrifty or civil and human creatures, but heathen or rather savage and brute beasts'.¹ The best course, they considered, would be to exterminate them: 'Thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them', was the admonition of George Andrews, Bishop of Ferns and Loughlin.² This attitude towards the natives was supported by their emblematic image of Ireland as a wilderness ferociously resisting the imposition of order and discipline: the anarchic garden. To them it was a wild and hostile place, inhabited by savages. In *As You Like It* Shakespeare refers to Irish rats and wolves,³ and in *Richard II* the Irish themselves are likened to snakes, 'which live like venom where no venom else but only they have privilege to live'.⁴ But above all the Irish are rebels: Henry VI deplures 'rebels up', 'the civil indiscipline', when 'the incivil kerns of Ireland are in arms and temper clay with blood of Englishmen'.⁵ This is a savage and wilful stamping on the gift of civilization that the English had unselfishly proffered. The Earl of Clarendon, as late as 1719, was still berating the Irish because 'they wantonly and disdainfully flung those blessings from them'.⁶

¹ Hugh Kearney, *Strafford in Ireland, 1633-1641: A Study in Absolutism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959, revised 1989), p. xxv.

² *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

³ *As you like it*, ed. by Albert Gilman, Signet Classics (New York: New American Library, 1963), III. 2. 173 & V. 2. 108.

⁴ *Richard II*, ed. by Peter Ure, Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1956), II. 1. 157.

⁵ *Henry VI, Part 2*, ed. by Andrew S. Cairncross, Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1957), III. 1. 310.

⁶ Kearney, *Strafford in Ireland*, p. xxxv.

The chaos of Ireland was of deep concern for the English: they regarded chaos as contagious, like the spread of a pernicious weed, according to Lecky:

The Government believed [...] that the one effectual policy for making Ireland useful to England was, in the words of Sir John Davis, 'to root out the Irish' from the soil, to confiscate the property of the septs and plant the country systematically with English tenants.⁷

If *The Tempest* expresses something of the English idea of Utopia, an island where man's will and art tames and keeps in control the elemental forces, then Ireland was a Dystopia, and the Irish were all Calibans.

Through the reign of Elizabeth, the English fought a series of wars of extermination against the Irish. Like all such wars, it produced successive waves of refugees, who fled rather than face certain death. Ironically, they fled to England, one place that was not full of rampaging English soldiers. And so numbers of Irish characters begin to appear on the English stage, as menials and the butt of jokes about their inability to speak English properly. So well-known had the Irish become as a recognizable minority that Duggan points to three plays of the first half of the seventeenth century which have characters disguising themselves as Irish. In Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* (1600), the young hero disguises himself as an Irish coster-monger, selling apples. *The Welsh Ambassador*, of unknown authorship, has a runaway brother of the king pretend to be an Irish footman, and in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Coxcomb* (before 1625) the lover disguises himself as an Irish servant to gain access to his mistress. In Ben Jonson's *The New Inn* (1629) there is a Lady Frampul who pretends to be an Irish beggarwoman.⁸ These 'low' characters indicate the attitude of the English to

⁷ Lecky, I, p. 14.

⁸ J.C. Duggan, *The Stage Irishman: a history of the Irish play and stage characters for the earliest times* (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1937), p. 184.

the Irish Diaspora, but there are other stories being told too. The first stage Irishman is reckoned to be Captain Macmorrice, in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, a type of the *miles gloriosus*, and a template for the rattling, cursing, boasting Irishman. A closer look however, reveals a somewhat subtler portrait. Macmorrice is, in fact the first Irish aristocrat to appear on stage.

The First Stage-Irish Aristocrat:

David Krause is very severe with Macmorrice and his successors. He writes:

The braggart-warrior as Stage Irishman made one of his earliest if brief appearances as Captain Macmorrice in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and thereafter he became a stock figure of ridicule, the roaring and blundering Celt with his standard equipment of bulls, blarney, and brogue.⁹

Krause's evaluation is far too simple and too paranoid a reading of the part. He misses the crucial point that Macmorrice is not a Stage-Irishman; he is a Stage-soldier, who happens to be an Irishman.

In *Henry V*, Act II, Macmorrice is the director of the siege of Harfleur. The Duke of Gloucester is nominally in command but 'the order of the siege is given' to Macmorrice.¹⁰ He is the sapper, the siege expert; he is also a Gentleman: the attack 'is altogether directed by an Irishman, a very valiant gentleman'.¹¹ He is not overseeing

⁹ David Krause, 'The Theatre of Dion Boucicault', in *The Dolmen Boucicault*, ed. by David Krause (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1964), p. 39.

¹⁰ *Henry V*, ed. by J.H. Walter, Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1954, repr. 1960), III. 2. 69.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, III. 2. 70.

the siege from a distance, but is taking an active part, leading the engineers, digging under the walls to blow them up and make a breach. He needed another hour to complete his delicate, dangerous work, and is furious when a retreat is called at such a critical juncture. He was, after all, supposed to be in charge of the siege. "Ish ill done," he repeats angrily.¹²

This portrayal of The Soldier is not unsympathetic; his blood is up in the presence of danger, and he is spoiling for battle. Holding a conference at this critical stage of the siege is, to him, a complete waste of time: 'It is no time to discourse [...] it is shame on us all [...] and there is throats to be cut.'¹³ He is in a foul humour at being called back when he had almost dug through, and he is in no mood to bandy arguments with the garrulous Fluellen about the relative merits of gunpowder and ancient Roman methods. The two are at opposite ends of the military spectrum: Fluellen is a man of words, Macmorrice a man of action. But even with his attention elsewhere, he can sense an insult from the Welshman, who privately thinks 'he is an ass as is in the world' because he had departed from classical tactics in the conduct of the siege.¹⁴ When Fluellen mentions his "nation" he takes instant offence. It is interesting to note that in Fluellen's mind, Macmorrice is of a different nation from him and from the English, that there is, in fact, a distinct Irish nation, and Macmorrice belongs to it. He takes umbrage at Fluellen's remark because of its connotations of otherness and lessness; any more than Thomas Prior two hundred years later he does not consider himself a member of a separate nation but one of the 'English of Ireland'. We can see in him what came to be the typical Anglo-Irish duality; he is remaking himself in the English army, to blend in

¹² *Ibid.*, III. 2. 91.

¹³ *Ibid.*, III. 2. 110.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III. 2. 74.

and become acceptable. As a consequence, he seems to deny his Irishness. ‘What ish my nation?’ he cries. ‘Who speaks of my nation? Ish a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal.’¹⁵ There are two ways of taking this remark, however. One is that this is catchpenny stuff, to massage the groundlings familiar with the Irish troubles by denigrating the Irish. This was 1599, the year of the Battle of the Yellow Ford, at the height of the Nine Years War; Essex was currently floundering around in Ireland. But Macmorrice is also refusing to allow any distinction or distance between himself and his English peers, a familiar refrain among the English of Ireland. He correctly evaluates the remark as a veiled insult, and reacts accordingly with a volley of personal abuse directed at the prosy, obtuse Welshman.

Having taken it severely amiss to be excluded, Macmorrice becomes even more irate when Fluellen, attempts to equate himself with him in professional skill and in birth. He snarls like a true aristocrat:

FLUELLEN Being as good a man as yourself, both in disciplines of war,
 and in the derivation of my birth.
MACMORRICE I do not know you as good a man as myself: so Chrish save
 me, I will cut off your head.¹⁶

But a parley sounds and Macmorrice has to go and attend to the siege – his professionalism claims him and he instantly forgoes the row for more important things.

Apart from his odd language and his quick temper, Macmorrice comes across as an, active, expert soldier, a leader of men and impatient of talkative fools. The language that Shakespeare gives him rings authentically of someone using English but thinking

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, III. 2. 125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 2. 132.

in Irish and using Irish idioms. 'Give over' is still used as a past-participle in their English speech by native Irish speakers – "the siege is give over" could have been said today by someone from Gweedore. But Macmorrice is not a Donegal name, nor is it to be found anywhere in Ireland; it is a concoction by Shakespeare. The name is obviously Fitzmaurice, which only becomes MacMuiris in Irish, which language Macmorrice would decline to use. This makes him Norman-Irish, or Old English, and puts him firmly among the aristocrats, and also accounts for his being a captain and a person of importance, holding the premier authority at the siege. Perhaps Shakespeare did not use the name Fitzmaurice because such an obvious Norman patrimony would give him too much caste and overbalance the scene.

He is not a braggart or a *miles gloriosus* as the commentaries have decided, nor is he a 'pugnacious braggart with a mouth-full of oaths' as Hugh Hunt calls him¹⁷, just because he repeats 'so Chrish save me', a sort of soldier's mantra, four times.

He is one of the bilingual Anglo-Norman gentry, owing a feudal allegiance to the king of England, and trying to be accepted as one of themselves by the English aristocracy, by excelling at 'the disciplines of the war.'¹⁸ With the rise of English power in Ireland, a number of the old Norman families were sloughing off their Irish ways and reverting to English manners and family names.¹⁹ What we have in Macmorrice is the rare spectacle, in drama, of one of the Old English on his way to becoming one of the New English, denying his separateness, insisting on the status of his birth and blood, and

¹⁷ Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1979* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 3.

¹⁸ *Henry V*, II. 2. 197.

¹⁹ J.C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition*, p. 28.

pursuing his goals in the time-honoured fashion of his Norman forbears – on the field of battle.

People take amiss Shakespeare's attempt to render his speech, but Shakespeare does no more than aspirate his *s* sound, to produce, not the clean 's' of English speech but the aspirate 's' of Hiberno-English. At the same time he gives Macmorrice a distinguishing verbal tic – 'so Chrish save me' – just as he gives Fluellen a Welsh 'look you', and a Scots 'gud' to Jamie. To call him a Stage Irishman rather than an Irish character on the stage is a pejorative, pre-emptive and *political* action, not a dramatic criticism at all. It stinks of political correctness in its implication that anything less than a relentlessly positive portrait of a given section of humanity is unacceptable.

A character on stage, which begins with all the appearance of stereotype, can, with sympathetic acting, develop into a real, rounded character, one that the audience takes to its heart, if it rings true for them. Captain Molineux in *The Shaughraun* is a case in point. What appears to start off as a sort of cartoon Englishman should grow and develop in the course of the performance into a rounded and real person. The part of Molineux is written economically and in the hands of a poor actor can degenerate into caricature, and probably has on many occasions. As an English character in front of an Irish audience, it would be tempting for an actor to create a lazy characterization from ready-made tics and hand-me-down business. This is what happened to Irish characters before English audiences. What impacts on the audience is the actor's performance, not the writer's. A good actor can make a real character out of a stereotype. We cannot blame Boucicault and the other *writers* for the Stage-Irishman – they simply wrote

characters. The actor then either fleshed it out to a felt reality or lazily presented it with a ready-made bag of tricks that were already familiar to the audience. The crucial factor in the equation is the tolerance level of the spectators; the Stage-Irishman is a sort of underhand convention, surreptitiously agreed between actors and audience. Shaw acknowledges this, when he speaks of the Stage Irishman in Act One of *John Bull's Other Island*:

Is it possible that you don't know that all this top-o-the-morning and broth-of-a-boy and more-power-to-your-elbow business is as peculiar to England as the Albert Hall concerts of Irish music are? No Irishman ever talks like that in Ireland, or ever did, or ever will. But when a thoroughly worthless Irishman comes to England, and finds the whole place full of romantic duffers like you, who will let him loaf and drink and sponge and bray as long as he flatters your sense of moral superiority, by playing the fool and degrading himself and his country, he soon learns the antics that take you in. He picks them up at the theatre and the music hall.²⁰

The Stage-Irishman, then, could be considered as a mixture of national sensitivity and bad acting.

²⁰ George Bernard Shaw, *John Bull's Other Island and Major Barbara: also How He Lied to Her Husband* (London: Constable, 1930), I, p. 5.

The First Play: *Gorboduc*, Dublin Castle, September 7th. 1601:

Gilbert writes in his *History of Dublin* (1854):

The first notice of a regular dramatic piece performed in Dublin is to be found in a writer of the early part of the last century, who tells us that "Mr Ogilby, the Master of the Revels in this kingdom (who had it from proper authority), informed Mr. Ashbury that plays had often been performed in the Castle of Dublin, when Blount, Lord Mountjoy, was Lord Lieutenant here at the latter end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. And Mr. Ashbury saw a bill for wax-tapers, dated the 7th day of September, 1601 (Queen Elizabeth's birthday), for the play of 'Gorboduc' done at the Castle, one and twenty shillings and two groats." "But it is to be supposed", adds the same author, "they were the gentlemen of the court that were the actors on this occasion."²¹

The city guilds staged dramatic productions in English on high-days and holydays all through the sixteenth century, and possibly much earlier.²² The students and Bachelors of Trinity College, and the law students at the King's Inns also performed plays towards the end of the century, but it was the interest and enthusiasm of the Dublin Castle set that created the theatre, and it was their patronage that kept it going.

The earliest record of a surviving text being performed in Ireland is emblematic of the theatre's place and development in the country's culture and politics, and of the way that drama and politics were to intertwine over the centuries. This dangerous commingling occurred in England too; Elizabethan playwrights were forbidden to show English history or politics on stage at the time of the Essex rebellion, and Essex's revolt also plays a role in the first known play of the Irish theatre.

²¹ Sir John Gilbert, *Gilbert's History of Dublin*, (Dublin: McGlashan and Gill, 1854-59) <<http://indigo.ie/~kfinlav/Gilbert/gilbert1.htm>> [accessed 12/12/2002] (p. 17 of 21).

²² Walter Harris, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Dublin*, Ch. VII: 'Of the interludes and plays antiently represented on the stage by the several corporations of the city of Dublin' (Dublin: printed for Laurence Flynn in Castle-Street & James Williams in Skinner-Row, 1763?) <<http://indigo.ie/~kfinlav/Harris/chapter7.htm>> [accessed 12/12/2002] (pp. 1-3).

On the 7th of September 1601, at Dublin Castle, Charles Blount, Baron Mountjoy, then Lord Deputy, had a production given of *Gorboduc*. That this was an elaborate and important production is shown by the amount of money spent by the authorities on wax tapers to light the show, not tallow but the best quality candles made from wax: the cost was twenty one shillings and two pence, a huge amount of money, considering The King's Company, London's leading group of actors, who visited Youghal during 1625, were only paid 5 shillings, all told.²³

Mountjoy and his court were fond of putting on plays. Gilbert quotes Harris as claiming that high society, centred on the Lord Deputy and the Castle, had taken up dramatics as a modish recreation. Lord Mountjoy's regime, which covered the last three years of Elizabeth's reign, saw amateur performances at Dublin Castle, most likely in either the dining hall or the audience chamber.²⁴

The play chosen for this elaborate occasion in 1601 was *The Tragedy of Gorboduc* by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton. This play had been written by the two when they were students at the Inns of Court in 1561 and presented there in that year. It was so successful that it was repeated before the queen in a command performance. It is an important play in being the first that substituted blank verse for rhymed verse, and dealt with subject matter drawn from English legend instead of classical myth or history. The play foreshadows *King Lear* in dealing with a foolish king, Gorboduc, who divides his kingdom between his two sons, and so plunges the land into civil war. The Preparatory

²³ William Smith Clark, *The Early Irish Stage: The beginnings to 1720* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 19.

²⁴ *Gilbert's History of Dublin* [accessed 12/12/2002] (p. 17).

Argument states: 'The succession of the crown became uncertain, they fell to civil war, in which both they and many of their issues were slain, and the land for a long time almost desolate and miserably wasted.'²⁵

Mountjoy saw this theme in an English context. His eyes were fastened on the English court even though his duties lay in the defeat of O'Neill and O'Donnell. He was faced with the problem of the absent courtier – how to maintain political access and influence from a distance. Faced with the problem of attracting Elizabeth's attention, Mountjoy seems to have been of the opinion that the play was the thing to catch the attention of the Queen. The occasion makes a political statement. The birthday of the queen is marked by a play that is known to be a favourite with her. It is mounted with expensive display, in the full knowledge that the details will be reported. The lavish celebration of her birthday is a conspicuous declaration of loyalty but at the same time an acknowledgement of the great age she has achieved – she was sixty-eight on that day.

Mountjoy had been the queen's original choice to subdue Ireland but instead she had been blandished by her favourite, Essex, into giving him the appointment as Lord Deputy. Instead of marching against O'Neill, Essex had made a secret truce with him, and then returned to England without being recalled, leaving his army behind. Elizabeth was furious; she stripped him of his emoluments, and refused to allow him attend the court. He was tried by a Star Chamber and placed under house arrest. Essex sullenly declared that the queen was 'an old woman whose mind was as crooked as her

²⁵Sackville and Norton, 'The Preparatory Argument' to *Gorboduc*, in *Medieval and Tudor Drama*, ed. John Gassner (New York: Bantam Books, 1963), p. 406.

body', and began plotting to replace her.²⁶ The queen was approaching seventy, a great age in that era, and there was no heir to the throne. The kingdom was insecure, and it is to this uncertainty that the choice of *Gorboduc* speaks.

In choosing a play from 1562, Mountjoy was deliberately passing over all the modern *oeuvre*, the great works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, to choose a play by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton from forty years previously. It was a safe choice to make, since Elizabeth had already chosen it herself for a command performance at that time, but the reasons were more complex than that.

Mountjoy was under suspicion because of his links with Essex. They were both handsome young men who were the queen's favourites at court. At first their rivalry over her had led to a duel which they survived to become friends. In 1590, Essex's sister, Penelope Devereux, had become Mountjoy's mistress. (She is also one of the leading candidates for the role of the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's sonnets). She was married to Lord Rich and was the mother of his five children, but her husband was forced to acquiesce to the liaison with Mountjoy for fear of Essex, the second most powerful person in the land. She had six more children by Mountjoy. With Essex in trouble, her husband was moving to rid himself of the treasonous connection and his adulterous wife; Mountjoy's name now became openly associated with Essex's sister.

To add to Mountjoy's problems, his brother, Sir Christopher Blount, was a leading adherent of Essex, and was later to be beheaded with him in the Tower. Worst of all,

²⁶ Anthony Burgess, *Shakespeare* ((London: Jonathan Cape, 1970; Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 184.

Essex had been in communication with Mountjoy, who had replaced him in Ireland in 1600, trying to get his support for rebellion, imploring him to land his troops in Wales and march on London. Discretion was a foreign country to Essex: he had also sent emissaries to seek help from James VI of Scotland. It was opportune for Mountjoy to make a very public declaration of his loyalty and pure intentions, and this he did with *Gorboduc*.

Thomas Sackville, one of the authors of the play, had risen in the world to become High Treasurer of England. The revival of his play in such a public way had to be seen as a flattering gesture by a man who held the royal purse-strings. Sackville was also, as publicly as was politic, an adherent of the claims of James VI of Scotland to the throne of England. Mountjoy was of the like opinion, and that is what the subtext of the performance is communicating, while demonstrating an unswerving allegiance to the existing power, and deploring the vile insurrection of Essex.

The reason why the play was written in 1562, and why it took the fancy of the young Elizabeth, no longer obtained in 1601. When she ascended the throne in 1558 she was twenty-five years old and beset by enemies on all sides: from outside the country by the two most powerful nations in Europe, France and Spain, and from within by fanatical Protestants and outraged Catholics, and by powerful ambitious nobles, but above all by Mary Queen of Scots when she returned from France as the widow of Francis II in the previous year, 1561. Catholics considered all of Henry VIII's children

illegitimate and so having no right to the throne. To them the rightful monarch was Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, as the nearest legitimate great-grandchild of Henry VII.

Gorboduc speaks eloquently of the dangers of a divided kingdom and the horrors of a possible civil war:

Woe to wretched land,
That wastes itself with civil sword in hand! ²⁷

With fire and sword thy native folk shall perish,
One kinsman shall bereave another's life,
The father shall unwitting slay the son,
The son shall slay the sire and know it not.
Women and maids the cruel soldier's sword
Shall pierce to death, and silly children lo,
That playing in the streets and fields are found,
By violent hands shall close their latter day'
[...]
Thus shall the wasted soil yield forth no fruit,
But dearth and famine shall possess the land. ²⁸

By 1601, the situation had changed. The country was dominant internationally and Elizabeth and her advisers were firmly in control. But the lesson still bore repeating: a divided country will tear itself apart.

The body of the play, about the dangers of competing claims on the throne, and the resulting civil war, may not apply with the same force after forty-two years, but the beginning and the end spring into new relevance in 1601, when considered in relation to the present concerns, and may have been rewritten for the occasion.

²⁷ Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, *Gorboduc*, II. 2. 319, in *Medieval and Tudor Drama*, John Gassner, ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1963).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, V. 2. 371.

Essex's mad insubordination can be seen to be deplored in the play:

That no cause serves, whereby the subject may
Call to account the doings of his prince,
Much less in blood by sword to work revenge,
No more than may the hand cut off the head; ...
Though kings forget to govern as they ought,
Yet subjects must obey as they are bound.²⁹

The occasion is used to pour some judicious praise on the existing ruler, in a catchpenny speech that cries out to be directed straight at the audience, to rousing cheers:

Your majesty doth know
How under you, in justice and in peace,
Great wealth and honour long we have enjoy'd:
So as we cannot seem with greedy minds
To wish for change of prince or governance.³⁰

But there are other issues to be addressed, and other ears' attention to be caught; it is politically imperative to give some consideration to an eventual 'change of prince or governance'.

The play repeatedly expresses the necessity for a clear line of succession. In fact the whole play shows the dangers of not passing the monarchy cleanly and without mistakes or equivocation to the next generation:

And this doth grow, when lo, unto the prince,
Whom death or sudden hap of life bereaves,
No certain heir remains, such certain heir,

²⁹ *Gorboduc*, V. 1. 42. (This passage was inserted into the 1565 edition.)

³⁰ *Ibid.*, I. 2. 148.

As not all only is the rightful heir,
 But to the realm is so made known to be;
 And troth thereby vested in subjects' hearts,
 To owe faith there where right is known to rest.³¹

'Certain', 'rightful', 'faith' and 'right' strike like hammer-blows along the verse, battering home the importance of clarity and agreement in the line of descent.

Elizabeth's lack of an heir, that 'empty place of princely governance', has led to interest from various foreign powers who feel they will have some claim by inheritance on the vacant throne, but the preference for a native heir is clearly stated over the importation of some foreign prince:

Right mean I his or hers, upon whose name
 The people rest by mean of native line,
 Or by the virtue of some former law,
 Already made their title to advance.
 Such one, my lords, let be your chosen king,
 Such one, so born within your native land;
 Such one prefer, and in no wise admit
 The heavy yoke of foreign governance.
 [...] Keep out also
 Unnatural thralldom of stranger's reign;
 Ne suffer you, against the rules of kind,
 Your mother land to serve a foreign prince.³²

These lines had a particular relevance in 1562, when the play was first presented, as two of the possibilities at the time were that Elizabeth would marry Philip II and bring the country under the sway of Spain, or that Mary Queen of Scots, who had been married to the Dauphin of France, would topple Elizabeth and bring the country into the French domain. But in 1601, it points unambiguously in one direction. No foreign prince is to be considered as a valid heir, but someone who 'by virtue of some former

³¹ *Ibid.*, V. 2. 408.

³² *Ibid.*, V. 2. 327.

law, already made their title to advance'. James VI of Scotland is being put firmly in the frame. He will bring the old line of Henry VII back onto the throne: James is his great-great-grandson. The line of Henry VIII will die out with Elizabeth. James, although a Protestant, is unassailable by Catholics as he is the legitimate heir in the direct line, not a bastard offspring of Henry VIII.

A powerful signal is being sent to all who choose to see it. Mountjoy is taking advantage of his position in Ireland to present a play which might not have got past the Master of the Revels in England, where, due to the volatile political situation, there was a general ban on all works dealing with English history, and he has used it to make a complex and subtle statement of loyalty to the queen, concern about her age and succession, indicated his support for the most likely successor, and at the same time flattered the author of the play who was a powerful and rising man.

There is one other aspect of the final scene in *Gorboduc* which is worth noting in the intertwining of politics and drama which characterises the Irish theatre. The play's final scene has got a sting in the tail when it suddenly brings up the subject of the role and rights of Parliament. Parliament is seen as a kingmaker:

Forswear
Once to lay hand or take unto yourselves
The crown, by colour of pretended right,
Or by what other means so'er it be,
Till first by common counsel of you all
In parliament, the regal diadem
Be set in certain place of governance;
In which your parliament, and in your choice,
Prefer the right, my lords, without respect
Of strength or friends, or whatsoever cause

That may set forward any other's part.
For right will last, and wrong cannot endure.³³

This doctrine of the superiority of Parliament is ironic in light of the subsequent insistence of the Stuart kings on the absoluteness of their own prerogatives.

This first known play in the Anglo-Irish theatre shows already the main tendency of that theatre: it is an activity for Englishmen at the Irish court whose interest and advancement lie across the water, and whose eyes are fastened there. It is for the government and functionaries clustered around Dublin Castle, and the Gentry in town for the occasion. It takes no account at all of the country in which it occurs, or the natives of that country. The participants see themselves as Englishmen who are physically separated from events at the centre, by distance, just as those in far-flung corners of England are, but who mentally still inhabit the same space as anyone in London. The distance, however, and the status as a separate kingdom, was to prove crucial in the long run.

³³ *Gorboduc*, V. 2. 315.

The First Theatre in Ireland: Werburgh Street, 1634:

The tension between the Parliament and the Stuart kings prefigured at the end of *Gorboduc* intensified as the seventeenth century progressed. Shifting allegiances were a common phenomenon, and one the most notable turncoats was Thomas Wentworth, who went over to King Charles the First's side in 1628 and became one of his most rabid supporters. Wentworth, ruthless and ambitious, was made, at his own request, Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1633, where he set about turning the country into the king's private fief, where, as he said himself the King was to be 'as absolute here as any Prince in the whole world can be'.³⁴ Wentworth came to Ireland with a three-fold aim – to increase the king's revenues, to augment the king's prestige against the Puritan tendency, and to make Ireland a test case in absolute monarchy, before implementing it in England. 'The object of this great and wicked man', writes Lecky 'was to establish a despotism in Ireland as a step towards despotism in England.'³⁵

But for all his power in Ireland, the enemies of 'Black Tom Tyrant' used his absence from court to conspire against him. To combat this it was necessary for him not just to be a bountiful provider of land and money for the king, but to attract as much favourable attention as possible. Like Mountjoy thirty years before, Whitehall was his centre of attention, and everything he did was to keep his name and abilities in the forefront of the royal mind.

³⁴ Kearney, *Strafford in Ireland*, p. 7.

³⁵ Lecky, I, 31.

Wentworth did all he could to augment the prestige of his own position: he enlarged and extended Dublin Castle, and introduced the pomp of a court. His project was to build a city that reflected his importance as the king's regent and its own importance as the capital of the Kingdom of Ireland. This Court at the Castle became the focus for the top echelons of Dublin and Anglo-Irish society. Receptions and entertainments were frequent. Sir Adam Loftus wrote that in January 1633/4 he saw 'a play acted by his lordship's gentle [men]',³⁶ and, in January of the following year, 'We saw a tragedie in the parliament house, and which was tragicall, for we had no suppers.'³⁷

John Ogilby arrived from England around this time, possibly as tutor to Wentworth's children, or as a secretary to the Lord Deputy,³⁸ and erected the only pre-Restoration theatre outside of London in Werburgh Street, near the Castle. The date is uncertain, but 1634 seems most likely. Stockwell claims that Wentworth himself was the instigator of the project, 'who desired to maintain as brilliant a court as could be assembled outside of London and who considered the establishment of a theatre an effective provocative of wit and grandeur'.³⁹ Whether or not he instigated the theatre, he was soon its enthusiastic supporter and patron, and in February 1637/8 he created Ogilby 'Master of the Revels in Ireland', on his own authority, without reference to the king.

³⁶ Clark, p. 27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁸ *Gilbert's History of Dublin*: p.17: 'John Ogilby, who came over in 1633 in the train of the Lord Deputy Wentworth, by whom he was occasionally employed as an amanuensis'.

³⁹ La Tourette Stockwell, *Dublin Theatres and Theatre Customs (1637 - 1820)* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1938, repr. 1968), p. 2.

This patent tied the new theatre firmly into the establishment around the Castle. It left no doubt that the new theatre was for them, and by implication, about them. In the royal simulation that was the Viceregal court, the warrant from the Viceroy, in Clark's words, 'stamped Ireland's first theatre as the official godchild of the English Ascendancy'.⁴⁰

Wentworth, like Mountjoy, was exploiting, and demonstrating to his coterie, the political power of the theatre to create and bolster an image of a powerful individual or of a society. The strategy worked: the reputation of the new theatre rapidly reached London, and managed to lure the leading playwright of the day, James Shirley, to Dublin, to supply it with plays between 1636 and 1640. Gilbert writes that he came because he had relations in Ireland, and fled from the plague which closed the London theatres in 1636 and 1637,⁴¹ but Shirley tells us himself that he was attracted by the success of Wentworth's propaganda:

When he did live in England, he heard say
That here were men lov'd wit and a good play;
That here were gentlemen, and lords, a few
We're bold to say; there were some ladies too.⁴²

Therein he defines his prospective audience: gentlemen, lords and ladies: an aristocratic theatre.

⁴⁰ Clark, p. 32.

⁴¹ *Gilbert's History of Dublin*, p. 17.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

At first Shirley produced work to the same template that had succeeded in London, but there develops an air of increasing exasperation in his addresses to the audience. He has encountered unexpected difficulties; he did not realize how small his potential audience was, for example. The theatre was small and the audience was tiny; it was confined to the Court circle, the administration and the military officers. They could probably all fit in the theatre on one night. In the Prologue to *The Sisters* Shirley speaks of a play 'though ne'er so new, will starve the second day'.⁴³ Shirley came with a set of expectations, but found that they were not being fulfilled. We can follow, through his plays, Prologues and Epilogues, his attempts to understand his audience, and his increasing frustration at his lack of success.

His play *The Royal Master* got his Dublin career off to a flying start. It was performed in the Theatre with such success that the printed edition has no less than nine laudatory Prologues attached, one of which runs:

This play o' th' public stage,
Hath gained such fair applause, as't did engage
A nation to thy Muse; where thou shalt reign
Viceregent to Apollo.⁴⁴

The play was obviously a great success, and the playwright is flattered by being compared to the Viceroy, whose invocation ties him to the endeavour. Also note that mention of 'nation', in opposition to Macmorrice's disclaimer in *Henry V*, and which bears already, even in the 1630s, a connotation of separateness, and identifies the

⁴³ A.H. Nason, *James Shirley, Dramatist* (New York City: Arthur H Nason, 1915), p. 134.

⁴⁴ Stockwell, p. 10.

'nation' as the New English colonists, an aspiration that they had inherited from the Old English claims to autonomy.

The published play of 1638 is dedicated to George Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare, the premier nobleman of the Kingdom of Ireland: 'her first native ornament and top branch of honour',⁴⁵ which might seem to align Shirley with the Old English, whom he appears to regard as the indigenous inhabitants, but he is also keeping well in with the authorities that were presently in the ascendant. As well as its performance in the theatre, the play was presented by command on New Year's Day 1637, 'before the Right Honourable the Lord Deputy of Ireland, in the Castle'.⁴⁶ He topped his achievement with a gracious Epilogue to mark the New Year, addressed directly to Wentworth, using the occasion to burnish the Regent's reputation, and flattering his state in the presence of his coterie, in the assurance of the king's hearing of it.:

The day,
 having looked on you, hath hid his face,
 and changed his robe with stars to grace
 and light you, going to bed, to wait
 with trembling lustre on your state.
 All honour with your fame increase,
 In your bosom dwell soft peace,
 And justice, the true root of these!
 Wealth be the worst, and outside of your fate;
 And may not heaven your life translate,
 Till for your ROYAL MASTER and this isle,
 Your deeds have filled a chronicle!⁴⁷

⁴⁵ James Shirley, *The Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley*, ed. by W. Gifford and A. Dyce, 6 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1833; repr. 1966), IV, p. 103.

⁴⁶ Shirley's dedication to the 1638 edition of *The Royal Master*, in *Dramatic Works*, IV, p. 102.

⁴⁷ Shirley's epilogue to *The Royal Master*, IV, p. 187.

The Royal Master, which he probably brought with him, has no local colour, but in his next play *The Doubtful Heir*, Shirley began to glance at the local scene. The main plot has to do with the adventures of a lost heir and the constancy of his love for his betrothed through a series of vicissitudes, giving the play its two other alternate titles: *Rosania; or, Love's Victory*. But he includes a subplot which is a lot more interesting in that it examines the relationship between the Castle garrison and the tradesmen and shopkeepers of the town, and satirizes the adventurers and place-seekers clinging to the viceregal court. The play is directed at the military officers. The Prologue is couched in a military metaphor: love is a battle or a war. The viewpoint of the play is that of the unnamed Captain, who, as well as assisting the two principal lovers, is beset by his creditors, stupid and greedy city merchants. The Captain makes fools of them, first by selling them false patents to raise money, and then by impressing them into the army when they seek redress. Since the lower classes are lampooned in this fashion, they cannot have been part of the audience. The play is openly partisan on behalf of the military. The Captain is by far the most attractive character in it, and it also includes a paean in praise of the military's crucial role in securing the comfort and safety of the citizens, at the expense of their own:

'Tis we that keep your worships warm and living
 By marching, fasting, fighting, and a thousand
 Dangers; you o'ergrown moths! You that love gold
 And will not take an angel sent from heaven,
 Unless you weigh him
 [...]
 These are walking sicknesses, not citizens.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Shirley, *The Doubtful Heir*, I. 1. in *Dramatic Works*, IV, p. 285.

The war-footing of the country is discernible behind the drama. The military establishment are shown as the saviours and guardians of this society, living a difficult and dangerous life, while the middle classes enjoy the fruits of their hardships. They are always short of money and preyed on by the very people they protect:

When they shall fast, and march ten months in armour.
 Sometimes through rivers, sometimes over mountains
 And not have straw at night, to keep their breech
 From growing to the earth; in storms, in heats,
 When they have felt the softness of a trench
 Thigh deep in water, and their dung to fatten it;
 When they shall see no meat within a month,
 But chew their match, like liquorice, and digest
 The bark of trees, like salads in the summer;
 When they shall live to think there's no such thing
 In nature as a shirt, and wonder why
 A tailor was created, when they have
 As much in ready shot within their flesh
 As would set up a plumber, or repair
 A church with lead; beside ten thousand more
 Afflictions, which they are sure to find,
 They may have Christianity, and not put
 A soldier to the payment of his debts.⁴⁹

Shirley in the play is beginning to feel his way into his adopted society, trying to differentiate his audience into different strands, and in *The Doubtful Heir* he is looking to win the approval of the military class, who are hedonistic, well-bred, fond of the theatre, and fond of spending money, even if they do not have it. He mirrors their lives in a very sympathetic light. The trouble with this approach is that while it may please one section, it is almost certain to alienate another.

This was a very factionalised society, and there were other strands of this social tapestry that Shirley did not greatly care for. He was a committed Catholic Royalist,

⁴⁹ *The Doubtful Heir*, I. 1. in *Dramatic Works*, IV, p. 294.

who later fought on the king's side in the Civil War. The Administration under Wentworth was made up of Protestants Royalists, but that was not so in the country as a whole. The Old English, most of whom clung to Catholicism, saw unswerving loyalty to Charles I as their best hope of retaining their estates, but the Protestant New English were incensed at Charles' softness in restoring land to the older colonists that had been taken from them in the Plantations. The Puritan tendency was confined largely to the middle class citizens, who did not attend the theatre, and spent their time making money; they are lampooned for it in *The Doubtful Heir*. But they were gaining ground, and in the light of Charles' loosening grip, a number of the Ascendancy royalists were getting ready to change sides, if it should prove necessary.

Part of the theatre's problem from its inception was the narrowness of its clientèle, and this was further aggravated by Wentworth's failure to call any Parliament together between 1636 and 1639; this deprived the city of the regular presence of the Lords and leading Commoners who had no imperative need to come to town, and so left the city without its leaders of fashion and *ton*. 'Oh do not bury all your brain in glebes', Shirley pleads in one of his Prologues,⁵⁰ because the fashionable coterie is shrunk to the administrators, the military, and the legal. Sessions of the law courts went some way to boost the attendance, but he still finds fault, whacking his audience with a legal metaphor:

Are there no more?...
 We did expect a session, and a train
 So large, to make the benches crack again.
 There was no summons, sure; yet, I did see

⁵⁰ 'A Prologue to the Irish Gent', *Dramatic Works*, VI, p. 492.

The writs abroad, and men with half an eye
Might read on every post – this day would sit
Phoebus himself and the whole court of wit.⁵¹

In the Prologue he wrote to Fletcher's *No Wit to a Woman's* Shirley is forced to admit that his audience had a personality of its own, and to see that it would not do simply to reiterate his method of writing for the London stage. The audience looked to London as the centre of the Universe, but they also wanted to see something of their own experience on the Dublin stage. He twigs them with their insularity, invoking yet again the persistent metaphor of Ireland as a garden stubbornly resisting cultivation:

It is our wonder that this fair island, where,
The air is held so temperate,
[...]
That to the noble seeds of art and wit,
Honour'd elsewhere, it is not natural yet.
[...].
While others are repaired and grow refined
By arts, shall this only to weeds be kind?⁵²

This was probably a mistake: no audience likes being talked down to. Shirley then goes on to compound the mistake, implicitly calling his hearers Irish by calling up the image of the snakes:

Let it not prove a story of your time
And told abroad to stain this promising clime,
That wit and soul-enriching poesy,
Transported hither, must like serpents die.⁵³

He threatens to leave town with his Players: - 'Awhile to the country, leave the town to blush/ Not in ten days to see one coat of plush.'⁵⁴ This was an empty threat, given his

⁵¹ Prologue to *The General*, in *Gilbert's History of Dublin*, p. 19.

⁵² Prologue to *The Irish Gent*, in *Dramatic Works*, VI, p. 491.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

⁵⁴ Prologue to *The General*, in *Dramatic Works*, IV, p. 496.

well-known aversion to the country and preference for the town. He becomes increasingly annoyed by the failure of his audience to fully appreciate him: 'Were there a pageant now on foot, or some / Strange monster from Peru or Afric come / Men would throng to it,' he spits.⁵⁵

Shirley sets his plays in foreign countries, usually Italy, but the incidents and the social intercourse are those of the contemporary scene, either London or Dublin, and there seems to have been very little difference between the two. The characters he creates are drawn from the courts of Charles I and Wentworth, and he is prepared to state what he sees. He is prepared to take their patronage, but he insists on his independence. He is fond of referring to himself as 'The Poet', and he reserves the poet's prerogatives. He is the outsider in this society and sees it as his duty, not just to entertain them, but to point out their shortcomings, criticise their taste, and even attack the corruption of the highest among them. There is a barbed passage in *St. Patrick for Ireland* that seems to point straight at Wentworth himself and his mercenary activities:

Great men in office that desire execution of the laws; not so much to correct offenses, and reform the commonwealth, as to thrive by their punishment, and grow rich and fat with a lean conscience.⁵⁶

He was finding that the audience wanted, and expected, to see themselves imaged on the stage, and did not identify with his creations – the humours, in Jonsonian terms, did not ring true; what he observed around him was not what they wanted to see. He seems from his own remarks to have offended some sections of the population. His relationship with the lawyers was, at best, ambiguous. In the Prologue to *The General*,

⁵⁵ 'A Prologue to Another of Master Fletcher's plays', in *Dramatic Works*, VI, p. 493.

⁵⁶ Shirley, *Saint Patrick for Ireland*, V. 1. in *Dramatic Works*, IV, p. 427.

he writes: 'Oh, dreadful word, *vacation*. [...] Would the term were come/ Though law come with it.'⁵⁷ In his exasperation, he sails a little too close to the wind when addressing the lawyers in the audience:

We are sorry gentlemen, that with all the pains
To invite you hither, the wide house contains
No more. Call you this term? If the courts were

So thin, I think, 'twould make your lawyers swear,
And curse men's charity, in whose want they thrive.⁵⁸

His tendency to plain speaking did not endear him to the courtiers either. He wrote of himself in 1639, perhaps in a reference to a withdrawal of the Viceroy's patronage: 'I never affected the ways of flattery: some say I have lost my preferment by not practising that court sin.'⁵⁹ Or he could be referring to trouble he had in London for putting characters too easily recognized as real into his play, *The Ball*. An entry in the office book of the Master of the Revels, dated 18th November 1632, concerning that play, says:

There were divers persons personated so naturally, both of lords and others of the court, I took it ill, and would have forbidden the play, but that Biston promised many things which I found fault withal should be left out, and that he would not suffer it to be done by any poet any more, who deserves to be punished. And the first that offends in this kind, of poets or players, shall be sure of public punishment.⁶⁰

He returns again to his inability to flatter and prostitute his poetry in a poem dedicated 'to the excellent pattern of beauty and virtue L (ady) E (lizabeth) C (ountess) of O (rmond)':

⁵⁷ Prologue to *The General*, in *Dramatic Works*, VI, p. 496.

⁵⁸ Prologue, *No Wit to a Woman's*, in *Dramatic Works*, VI, p. 492.

⁵⁹ Dedication to *The Maid's Revenge*, Nason, p. 120.

⁶⁰ Nason, p. 231.

I never learn'd that trick of court to wear
 Silk at the art of flattery; or made dear
 My pride, by painting a great lady's face
 When she had don't before, and swear the grace
 Was Nature's; anagram her name,
 And add to her no virtue, my own shame.⁶¹

It is obvious enough that he is no courtier, and there is no doubt that he gave offence; in the Prologue to *Saint Patrick for Ireland* he says of some of the audience, 'They come not with a purpose to be pleas'd.'⁶² We may suppose then they came to be displeased, and the likelihood is that his bluntness has outraged the ladies of the Court, because he goes on to add; 'Nor confine we censures; would that each soul were masculine.'⁶³ He had a grating habit of reminding the great and the good that their glory will come to an end, and that we will all die and mingle in the grave. His best known poem expresses it succinctly:

The glories of our blood and state,
 Are shadows, not substantial things;
 There is no armour against Fate;
 Death lays his icy hand on Kings:
 Sceptre and Crown,
 Must tumble down,
 And in the dust be equal made
 With the poor crooked scythe and spade.⁶⁴

His poem to the Countess of Ormond wishes her a happy death, and in the Epilogue he wrote to flatter Wentworth on New Year's Day he does the same thing. He was a man who could butter up this Ascendancy and cut the feet from under it at the same time. In that epilogue, he recommends that Wentworth look to his administration of justice, and

⁶¹ *Dramatic Works*, VI, p. 432.

⁶² *Dramatic Works*, IV, p. 365.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 365.

⁶⁴ 'Song from *The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses*', in *The Penguin Book of English Verse*, ed. by John Hayward (Harmondsworth Middlesex, 1956, repr. 1966), p. 101.

tells him bluntly that wealth, which Wentworth was busily and illegally amassing, was ‘the worst, and outside of your fate’, compared to honour, peace and justice. It is small wonder he lost his preferment.

He has done his best to create a dramatic genre for this audience, but it has turned out to be less sophisticated, more factional than London, and unsure of what it wanted. They expected to see themselves mirrored on the stage, but did not like what he had on offer. Their taste is poor, he tells them bluntly, their ‘palates are sick’.⁶⁵ They have a taste for spectacle rather than poetry. In a Prologue to a lost play called *The Toy*, he states that if their preference is for rubbish, that’s their own fault, there’s better stuff available:

So sickly are the palates now-a-days
Of men that come to see and taste our plays,
That when a poet hath, to please some few,
Spent his most precious sweat, Minerva’s dew,
And after many throes, a piece brought forth,
Legitimate in art, in nature, birth,
‘Tis not received, but most unhappy dies,
Almost as soon as born, wit’s sacrifice.
When children of the brain, not half so fair
And form’d, are welcome to the nurse and air.
Since ‘tis not to be helped, and that we find
Poems can lay no force upon your mind,
Whose judgements will be free, ‘tis fit we prove
All ways, till you be pleased to like and love.
But please yourselves, and buy what you like best.
Some cheap commodities mingle with the rest:
If you affect the rich ones, use your will,
Or if *The Toy* take, you’re all welcome still.⁶⁶

He seems to have come to his wits’ end when he hit on his boldest stroke, the idea of creating a myth for the colony in *St. Patrick for Ireland*, by colonizing Irish legend. In

⁶⁵ Prologue to *Saint Patrick for Ireland*, in *Dramatic Works*, IV, p. 365.

⁶⁶ *Dramatic Works*, VI, p. 494.

the Prologue, he plaintively asks the audience for some sort of consistency in their likes and dislikes:

We can serve up but what our poets dress;
And not considering cost or pains to please
We should be very happy if at last
We could find out the humour of your taste,
You were constant to yourself and kept
That true.⁶⁷

He is doing this, he is saying, in an attempt to gratify the tastes of his audience, but it is their choice, not his. The audience is dictating what is being written, an open acknowledgement that this theatre belongs, body and soul, to its clientèle. He may have hoped to create in Ireland a theatre of poetry, in which the word would reign supreme. He persistently refers to himself as 'The Poet', not 'The Playwright', and in his first Dublin play, *The Royal Master*, he had declared his intention of abandoning the Masque: 'Pretty impossibilities...', he writes contemptuously, 'Some of the gods, that are good fellows, dancing,/ Or goddesses; and now and then a song /To fill a gap'.⁶⁸ But he acknowledges defeat with *Saint Patrick for Ireland*. He chose a subject with a local resonance, and used the full panoply of theatrical effect – song, dance, masque, spectacular scenery and scene changes, special effects, including two snake scenes and a trap with fire for Hell's mouth. He has been forced to slant the subject from the point of view of the colonial masters, the embryo Ascendancy, and in Shirley's play we can see clearly their bigotry and intolerance reflected. '*St. Patrick for Ireland*', writes Stockwell, 'reflects not merely the superficial life of a miniature English court, but the particular prejudice of a provincial outpost. The source of this

⁶⁷*Dramatic Works*, IV, p. 365.

⁶⁸ Morash, p. 7.

prejudice was the preconception on the part of the English colonists of their superiority over the native Irish.’⁶⁹

It is interesting to trace the lineaments of this conviction of superiority in this play, filtered through a not entirely sympathetic creative mind.

In *St. Patrick for Ireland* the native Irish aristocracy are shown as dissolute pagans and buffoons, their priests as panders and charlatans, the Bard a drunken ballad-singer. St. Patrick is an incoming English aristocratic figure spreading reason and light, banishing the snakes of superstition and ignorance: ‘at whose approach the serpents all unchained themselves,/ and leaving our prisoned necks, crept into the earth’.⁷⁰ Native culture is represented by Archimagus and other Irish nobles as immoral and decadent, needing to be replaced by the benignity and moderation of English influence. St. Patrick’s banishing of the snakes is a metaphor for the victory over the Irish, whom Shakespeare describes as snakes in *Richard II*. Or they are said to be as wild and dangerous as wolves. This is how Patrick rebukes the Irish for their bloodthirstiness:

In vain is all your malice, art and power
Against their lives, whom the great hand of heaven
Deigns to protect. Like wolves, you undertake
A quarrel with the moon, and waste your anger.⁷¹

Patrick is identified with the colonists’ effort to civilize the country; he bestows the benison of English civilization on the savage, decadent Irish. Saint Patrick’s

⁶⁹ Stockwell, p. 12.

⁷⁰ *St. Patrick for Ireland*, I. 1. in *Dramatic Works*, IV, p. 371.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, V. 2. p. 441.

introduction of himself and his followers is, 'We are of Britain,'⁷² and he is accompanied by a guardian angel called Victor. In this play, Shirley claims St. Patrick for the English colonial effort. St. Patrick, he is saying, brought progress from Britain in the fifth century, and the present colonists are repeating the process in the seventeenth. The political and the religious modes merge in the King's invitation to Patrick, which is a feudal submission to a more potent power:

We give thee now our palace, use it freely;
Myself, our queen and children, will be all
Thy guests and owe our dwellings to thy favour.⁷³

And Patrick's reminiscence of his Call to return to the country takes on a distinctly imperialist tinge:

This supreme King's command I have obey'd,
Who sent me hither to bring you to him,
And this still wand'ring nation.⁷⁴

God is definitely on the English side: the Irish god is a devil: 'a fury, the master fiend of darkness; and as hot as hell could make him'⁷⁵, who holds the Irish in subjection.

The coming of Christian/English ways will break their bonds and set them free:

He hath made me hear
From the dark womb of mothers, prison'd infants
Confessing how their parents are misled,
And calling me thus far to be their freedom.⁷⁶

⁷² *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 373.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, III. 1. p. 395.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 374.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, IV. 1. p. 414.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 2. p. 375.

But the struggle to bring the Irish to the light will not be easy; sacrifice and 'the blood of many martyrs'⁷⁷ will be called for before the final victory: thus turning the subduing of the country into a Crusade. The Irish, contrary to the known facts, swear to kill all the Christians, and drench the land with their blood, falling into the bloodthirsty rhetoric of barbarous rebels:

Were there no red in heaven, from the torn heart
Of Christians we that colour could impart
And with their blood supply the crimson streaks
That dress the sky, when the fair morning breaks.⁷⁸

Those who embrace the new dispensation will thrive, and their children prosper; Conallus, the king's son, convinced by the power that Patrick demonstrates, swears fealty to him: 'To him that can dispense such blessings, I must owe duty, and thus kneeling pay it.'⁷⁹ He is rewarded by a grant of the kingdom and a prophecy of his descendants' success:

Your crown shall flourish, and your blood possess
The throne you shall leave glorious: this nation
Shall in a fair succession thrive, and grow
Up the world's academy, and disperse,
As the rich spring of human and divine
Knowledge, clear streams to water kingdoms;
Which shall be proud to owe what they possess
In learning, to this great all-nursing island.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, IV. 1. p. 421.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, IV. 2. p. 421.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, V. 1. p. 434.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, V. 1. p. 438.

Those who oppose the new regime will suffer the fate of Archimagus, who is punished by the agents of the new power who 'shall catch my falling flesh upon / their burning pikes.'⁸¹

The Irish, even those who express loyalty, are not to be trusted. The King, Leogarius, embraces Patrick and swears friendship, but promptly goes off to plot another rebellion; Patrick remarks once he is gone, 'I suspect him still.'⁸² Only when all the snakes/Irish are banished, dead, or subdued, he says, will the island at last be safe for civilized people:

Hence, you frightful monsters,
Go hide, and bury your deformed heads
For ever in the sea! From this time be
This island free from beasts of venomous nature.
The shepherd shall not be afraid hereafter
To trust his eyes with sleep upon the hills,
The traveller shall from hence have no suspicion,
Or fear to measure with his wearied limbs
The silent shades; but walk through every brake
Without more guard than his own innocence.⁸³

Shirley has been very clever in rifling Irish history to create a myth for the colonists. This intervention, he says, has happened before, and with fruitful results, but decadence set in and the scheme has to be rescued; you are following in this proud tradition; your mission is to civilize these savages once again. He is stoking their prejudices and at the same time creating for them an image to live up to, that of a civilizing force among all these benighted pagans. Duggan was of the opinion that 'the play is of interest [...]

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, V. 1. p. 442.

⁸² *Ibid.*, V. 2. p. 442.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, V. 3. p. 441.

because it is one of the few plays of that age with a distinctly religious tone', but the play has nothing at all to do with religion.⁸⁴ What we are shown is two rival magical systems in conflict. The superior one is that with the more powerful magic, therefore that is the right one. Power equals truth. It is an odd sort of crusading muscularity. The power of the magus, Patrick or Archimagus, shows the power of the God. If power equals truth, then the winners are always right, so the English conquest of the country reflects the will of the more powerful English God. St. Patrick represents the New English incursion; religion is just a smokescreen.

Shirley leaves us in no doubt that this play was created at the behest of its audience; it attempts to mirror their attitudes and character, and shows us their bigotry and belligerence, their conviction of their own rectitude, that God is on their side. The gentry of the Castle were the audience, and Shirley gave them a myth that helped to anchor them to the country, to feel that they were not just newly-imported adventurers, but the inheritors of an ancient civilizing endeavour:

Our labour, and your story, native known,
It is but justice to affect your own.⁸⁵

Shirley was confident he had got it right with this play for this audience. He was clearly pleased with it, so much so that he mentions in both the Prologue and the Epilogue that he is ready to start Part Two. The present play is published as Part One but there is no record of his ever producing the second part: the Rebellion of 1641 may have overtaken him. Even though the play is criticized nowadays as 'an extraordinary

⁸⁴ Duggan, p. 20.

⁸⁵ *Saint Patrick for Ireland*, Epilogue, p. 443.

hodge-podge',⁸⁶ it has a swift vigour and vitality, and a Shakespearean range of effects. It has been charged with mere theatricality, but it is a play in which Shirley pulls out all the stops, to create a showcase for his own talents and to exploit all the theatrical tricks, techniques and possibilities of his day in order to massage the sensibilities of the courtiers and hangers-on at the court of the Viceroy, and to create for them a legend of belonging and high moral purpose. Turner writes:

Despite the fact that *Saint Patrick for Ireland* has been criticized for being “merely” theatrical, it is clear that theatricality is its *raison d’être*. Shirley was trying desperately to revive the failing theatrical venture in Dublin with a flashy, spectacular play utilizing Irish history and legend.⁸⁷

Criticism is levelled at the Old English in *St. Patrick for Ireland*. The question is implicit: what has happened to the civilization that Patrick and his followers brought with them, in the light of present conditions? The Irish are decadent idolaters, but a great number of the previous English colonists, instead of cleansing and enlightening the country, had actually embraced the wicked ways of the Irish. They may be considered worse decadents because they had further to fall. The burden of the play is that the country is in sore need of a new cleansing, a fresh shaking by the scruff of the neck to bring it up to scratch. The native Irish were in no position to respond to this charge, but the Old English, descendants of the Norman invasion and the earlier Plantations, were, and they had their say as well in the new theatre at Werburgh St.. The only other play from the period that survives could be taken as a riposte to *St.*

⁸⁶ *Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, 18 vols (Cambridge, University Press, 1907-1921) VI, Part 2; <<http://www.bartleby.com/216/0809.html>> [accessed 23/12/2002] (page 1 of 2).

⁸⁷ James Shirley, *A Critical Edition of James Shirley's 'Saint Patrick for Ireland'*, ed. by John P. Turner, Jr. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), p. 78.

Patrick for Ireland from the other side of the political divide, though it may have predated it. Henry Burnell's *Landgartha* was 'first acted St. Patrick's Day, 1639, printed Dublin 1641, as it was presented in the new Theatre in *Dublin*, with good applause'.⁸⁸ Henry Burnell, of Castleknock Castle, was a well-established member of the Old English aristocracy, who had never been to England.⁸⁹ He was married to a daughter of the Earl of Roscommon, and was to be a founder member of the Confederation of Kilkenny during the Rebellion of 1641.⁹⁰ He is the first Irish-born dramatist that we know of, and his play speaks of his dissatisfaction with the state of the country at the date of its first performance. There is a strong hint that the play is an answer to Shirley, who was well-known as the heir to Ben Jonson: 'that discipleship to Ben Jonson which he was ever ready to acknowledge'.⁹¹ In a dedicatory poem to *Landgartha* Burnell is eulogized:

Let others boast of their own faculties,
of being Son to *Jonson*) I dare say,
Thou art far more like to *Ben*: then they
That lay claim as heirs to him, wrongfully:
For he survives now only, but in thee
And his own lines; the rest degenerate.⁹²

The story of the play concerns the quarrel between Landgartha, a warrior queen of Norway, married to Reyner, King of Denmark. Landgartha is the blameless wife, who is wronged by her husband, but when she leaves him, he finds himself hapless and

⁸⁸ Stockwell, p. 18.

⁸⁹ 'Thou England never saw'st': Prologue to *Landgartha*, Catherine M Shaw, 'Landgartha and the Irish Dilemma', in *Eire-Ireland*, Spring 1978, 26-39 (p. 27).

⁹⁰ 'Henry Burnell' <http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/b/Burnell.Henry/life.htm> [accessed 08/01/2003] (p. 1 of 1).

⁹¹ *Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, VI, Part 2, [accessed 23/12/2002] (page 1 of 2).

⁹² Catherine M. Shaw, 'Landgartha and the Irish dilemma', p. 29.

regretful. Clark and Stockwell are of the opinion that Landgartha represents Ireland and the husband England, but this is too broad. Landgartha represents the Old English whose contest with the New English over control of the country was about to boil over. The two groups should be natural partners, but the treatment of Landgartha by her husband is such that she cannot support him any longer.

The play reflects the uneasy balance in the power structure. From the start of the seventeenth century the New English Protestant colonists controlled the central administration in Dublin, but the Catholic Old English controlled the local administrations, the towns and the legal profession. The native Irish were broken as a military and political power for the moment, but however demoralised, they could only be held down by the limited numbers of the New English with the support of the Old English. These descendants of the Norman incursion still controlled most of the wealth of the country but they were not trusted, in spite of their oft protested loyalty to the crown. J.C. Beckett writes:

Though they did not waver in ecclesiastical allegiance to Rome, they tried, on all occasions, to demonstrate that recusancy in religion was perfectly compatible with devotion to the crown in all secular matters. And they were at pains to emphasise not only their loyalty but their 'Englishness': families that had, in the past, become so far merged with the native population as to abandon their English surnames now thought it expedient to resume them, and with them, English dress and English ways of life.⁹³

But they were being kept out of the central corridors of power on account of their religion, and both sides were easy game for Wentworth and his policy of divide and rule, whereas if they could co-operate they might accomplish something, as they

⁹³J.C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition*, p. 28.

actually did after Wentworth's departure, when they combined in the Irish parliament to demand that Ireland should be governed according to the terms of her own constitution.

Burnell, judging by *Landgartha*, would have approved of such co-operation, but he is too pessimistic, or too much a realist for any such happy ending; he has Landgartha rescue her husband from his difficulties, but then leave him because of his conduct. Burnell casts the blame on the New English, but gives approval to the idea of a permanent power-sharing, not pleasing to either side, but broadly tolerable to both. The idea, says Burnell, is that a 'Tragi-Comedy sho'd neither end Comically or Tragically, but betwixt both'.⁹⁴

In the play, the Old English are represented by the female characters, the New English by males; he opens the play with a Prologue spoken by 'an Amazon with a Battle-Axe in her hand',⁹⁵ and the first two acts show Landgartha and her warrior women performing feats of valour, and winning battles. Burnell endows the Old Irish with the feminine virtues of chastity, fidelity and forgiveness, but shows them also as strong and martial. The New English have all the male vices of licentiousness, inconstancy, and self-indulgence. It was the Old English who won and preserved the country, he is saying, but, in everybody's best interests, were willing to share it with the New colonists, enacted in the solemn marriage of Landgartha and Reyner:

Wisdom bids be silent; this poor kingdom

⁹⁴ Burnell 'Afterword', *Landgartha*, in Wheatley & Donovan, I, p.68.

⁹⁵ *Gilbert's History of Dublin*, [accessed 12/12/2002] (p. 19 of 21).

Being already torn too much, by tyranny and troubles.
 Things past our help, with patience must be borne,
 Until a fit time.⁹⁶

But the New English are unfaithful to the bargain, and now want to get rid of the old colonists, in the belief that they don't need them any more.

Burnell now prophetically imagines a rebellion in the country. The rebel leader looks for assistance from 'the pious Christian emperor'⁹⁷ and from Landgartha, against her husband, in revenge 'for her repudiation and disgrace'.⁹⁸ But she comes instead to the aid of her estranged husband, and puts down the rebellion. She forgives her husband, and allows the marriage to stand, but refuses any intimate contact with him. In his dedication to the published play, Burnell states that she 'took not then, what she was persuaded to by so many, the Kings kind night-embraces'.⁹⁹

Landgartha gives us a glimpse of the simmering discontent and grievances of the older colonists as the country balanced on the brink of civil war. It shows us how the older Ascendancy consider they are regarded by the new powers in the land, their humiliation and sense of outraged virtue. The play is, simultaneously, an assertion of loyalty, a reminder of past favours and accomplishments, a complaint about maltreatment, and a warning to the dominant strain in the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy that their policies will lead to disaster. As indeed they did, but in the long run it was disaster

⁹⁶ ELSINORA *Landgartha*, II. 3. 165. in Wheatley and Donovan, I.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, IV. 4. 41.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, IV. 4. 11.

⁹⁹ 'Afterword', *Landgartha*, in Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 68.

for the Old English, and left the New Protestant Ascendancy even more firmly in control.

Landgartha is not a good play, and the main characters have nothing particularly definitive about them; they embody arguments without bringing them to life. But, apart from its exposé of Old English and New English attitudes, the play is significant for the character of Marfissa, the first appearance of a particular type of Anglo-Irish Ascendancy female, what Stockwell calls the ‘character of the witty, volatile, fox-hunting Irishwoman’,¹⁰⁰ a figure with a long future ahead of her. She is described as ‘an humorous gentlewoman of Norway’,¹⁰¹ and so clearly is one of the gentry. She speaks with an Irish turn-of-phrase: ‘Herself dare not deny it, sir.’¹⁰² She is also Irish in her dress. Burnell describes her costume as:

*An Irish Gown, tuck'd up to mid-leg, with a broad basket-hilt Sword on, hanging in a great Belt, Brogues on her feet, her hair dishevell'd, and a pair of long-neck'd Spurs on her heels.*¹⁰³

What he is describing here is a member of the Old English who has gone native. Her absorption extends beyond dress, to embracing Irish ways, in defiance of the main tenet of any colonial outpost, the preservation of distance and identity. In the course of the Masque to celebrate the marriage of Reyner and Landgartha, the harmony achieved is expressed in two dances. The royal couple and aristocrats dance a stately measure, while Marfisa and her companion ‘*dance the whip of Dunboyne merrily*’.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Stockwell, p. 21.

¹⁰¹ Clark, p. 38.

¹⁰² *Landgartha*, III. 1. 106.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, III. 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, III. 1. p. 41.

It is an image of harmony and mutual accommodation between two sides of the same culture that was about to come spectacularly apart due to the relentless aggression and legal banditry by the powerful newcomers. Burnell's play was published in Dublin in April 1641. In October of that year the Irish in Ulster rebelled, and before long the entire country was engulfed. Wentworth had been recalled in 1640, and Shirley returned too, probably on the same ship. The Lords Justices who now ran the country ordered the theatre at Werburgh Street to close, and its owner, Ogilby, went back to England to join the royalist army in the approaching Civil War.

Chapter II

Restoration

Comedy and Tragedy; Restoration Theatre in Dublin; Katherine Philips' *Pompey*; Orrery's *The Generall*; The First Duke of Ormond; John Dancer's *Nicomede*; Publication of Plays; Michelburne's *Siege of Derry*.

Comedy and Tragedy:

In the period after the Restoration of Charles II, the drama in Ireland and England appears to split, and two distinct streams of Restoration drama emerge - the Heroic Tragedy and the Comedy of Manners. The fracture was seismic, sending the two forms off along separate channels, with comedy attempting to demonstrate the reality of life, tragedy to show the ideal.

The Restoration court was intent on creating, in drama, a positive image of itself and its king. This was partly a reaction to its recent history: they had endured tragedy and dispossession in the downfall and execution of Charles I, but that was the catastrophe at the end of the third act; now they had, by the fifth act, re-established their heroic, aristocratic superiority; order was restored and the reign of Saturn come again. The splendour that Richelieu had created for the young Louis XIV was their envy and their ideal. Restoration plays reflect and glorify Restoration society: the comedies show its denizens as glittering wits, the tragedies as creatures of noble, exalted virtues.

The court had returned, after being immersed in European aristocratic culture for eleven years, to an England that lacked style or sophistication, and immediately set about raising the country to a European standard of culture. Dryden laid down literary standards; Robert Boyle founded the Royal Society to promote Science and reinvent the English language; Wren re-imagined the city of London; Locke and Hobbes rejected Plato and embraced Empiricism.

The Restoration Court was a corrupt and devious place and the problem of right or ethical action was compounded and skewed by the convention of Dissimulation, by the necessity of concealing the reality of one's personal thoughts and feelings behind a mask of proper manners. The end result of this ethos of dissimulation is the impossibility of knowing what anyone else is thinking or feeling, or of knowing what anyone is really like. If dissimulation is a passive concealment strategy, its active twin is 'Affectation' – actively living a lie, which is scourged repeatedly by the Restoration playwrights. Wycherley, in *The Country Wife*, has Horner say: 'A pox on 'em, and on all that force nature and would be still what she forbids 'em. Affectation is her greatest monster.'¹

Dissimulation and Affectation pose huge problems in relationships, and are the fertile ground for Restoration Comedy. Comedy explores and maps this distance between the mask and the face, and may propose ways across it in the interests of comic dramatic resolution. Restoration Tragedy, on the other hand, pushes Dissimulation and Affectation to their limits and creates an entirely artificial world, of superhumanly ethical heroes and impossibly moral heroines – a world of ideals. They took this model from Corneille, but expanded it further. This is how we should be, their tragedy says, this is how the best people should behave, because we see ourselves raised on a plateau above the rest of humanity, creatures to be astonished at, to enkindle *admiration* in the common herd. Tragedy follows the Platonic theory, Comedy the Empirical.

¹ William Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, ed. by Thomas H. Fujimura (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), I. 1. 148.

After the Restoration, Irish and English dramatic tastes ran in parallel, but then a rift opened, a gap which reflected the political and legal climate. Ireland was changing down from a kingdom to a colony. The mainland English were treating the English in Ireland as colonials, not metropolitans, a shift that outraged the first Earl of Orrery. When the English Parliament passed laws forbidding the importation of Irish cattle and corn, he wrote:

Since the export of cattle was forbidden, the land was put in tillage [...] and if now our corn were forbidden, and by the name of foreign corn, we should not only lose much, but lose it by being called foreigners, which was a name more grievous to us than the prohibition itself.²

The tentative attempts at dialogue, assimilation and accommodation among the different factions of the Irish Gentry that Burnell had suggested were blown away by the rebellion of 1641, the Civil War, and the Cromwellian invasion and Plantation. The Irish theatre after the Restoration belongs to the winners; it shows no differentiation from that of London: what is successful there is quickly put on in Dublin. Katherine Philips says that Ogilby snatched from her the text of *The Adventures of the Five Hours* which was the London success of that season, eager to present it with the minimum delay.³ It is also worth remembering that at Ogilby's new theatre at Smock Alley, with Philips' *Pompey* and Orrery's *The Generall*, Dublin was for a brief period ahead of the London theatrical fashions. This affinity of the two cities and the two theatres eventually led to the exodus of Irish actors and playwrights to London, where the population was ten times larger and the rewards of success correspondingly so. But the

²R. P. Mahaffy, ed., *The Calendar of State Papers for Ireland, 1666- 1669* (HM Stationery Office, 1905), p. 762.

³Clark, *The Early Irish Stage*, p. 65

popularity of the Heroic drama waned in England long before it did in Ireland. 'Between the years sixty and seventy, the taste of *England* was for Rhyming Heroic Fustian,' John Dennis wrote in 1696.⁴ The reason for its surviving much longer in Ireland was the partiality of 'the little circle of *grands seigneurs* at Dublin for it'.⁵ When we look at the plays known to be performed during the Restoration period (1660-1685) in Dublin, what is striking is the almost complete absence of comedy. Clark gives a list of the plays we have a record of, and apart from the works of Shakespeare, almost all the others are 'Rhyming Heroic Fustian'.⁶ This was the type of play that satisfied the leaders of fashion and taste in Dublin and continued to do so after the fashion had waned elsewhere.

The zeitgeist shifted to the Empirical and the comedies began examining real life and showing it on the stage, while the Heroic Tragedies stayed with the Platonic, and showed an ideal world. We may conclude then that the English court's tastes shifted in such a way as to want to see their own lives and its problems and ramifications on the stage, but the Irish court did not. These '*grands seigneurs*' did not want to see themselves as they were, but as noble heroes in a superstition-ridden wilderness, a bridgehead of civilization in a savage country. This idea of a heroic self-image is the sort of representation Shirley had been aiming for in *Saint Patrick for Ireland*. The colonial nobility continued to see themselves as characters to excite '*admiration*'. Such characters and plays are not meant to depict real life, but a life lived on an exalted, superhuman plane where Honour, Glory, Justice and Destiny rule, and debate takes the

⁴ W.S. Clark, 'Preface', in *Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery*, ed. by William Smith Clark II (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1937), p. xi.

⁵ As cited by Stockwell, page 33.

⁶ Clark, *Early Irish Stage*, Appendix C, pp. 204-206.

place of action, not on a small island bedevilled by violence where too many claimants are jostling in a grubby, sectarian scrum for land and advancement.

Clark is of the opinion that the noble, heroic, love and honour material is just an aesthetic style, with no pretensions to reality, but it goes deeper than that. The splendour of Ormond's regency had a political base, attempting to impress the population with its pomp, and to plant firmly in their minds the notions of supremacy, worth and strength – aesthetics as an arm of Government. Walter Benjamin holds that such aestheticization of politics is the stuff of Fascism, which seeks to deceive and deflect the proletariat with ritual,⁷ but the objective of viceregal pomp was more to inspire and confirm the loyalty of a sectarian and isolated society. The Dublin theatre was part of this environment of pageantry, and conformed to it. The comedies are subversive of established authority, but the tragedies affirm the aristocracy in their exalted ideas of their own worth. Just as in the work of Corneille and Racine, nobody except aristocrats appears in the Heroic Tragedies. In the ten years after the Restoration this affirmation was needed, but by 1670 the English aristocracy had nestled snugly into their old positions of authority, and comedy began to sprout questioningly. The relative insecurity and instability of the Irish situation caused the prolongation of the Heroic Tragedy and a corresponding suppression of comedy.

The Irish theatre was not driven by playwrights but by the patronage of the Castle and the inclinations of its aristocratic audience. Farquhar, Southerne, and Congreve went to

⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'
<http://pixels.film.tv.ucla.edu/gallery/web/julian_scaff/benjamin/benjamin5.html> , [accessed 27/5/2003]
(p. 4 of 5).

London with their comedies, not just because the rewards were greater, but because new comedy was not wanted in Dublin. Shakespeare, Beaumont, and the like were allowed; they were safe, but subversive comedy was not encouraged. Farquhar alludes to this in

Love and a Bottle:

LUCINDA But why no Poets in *Ireland*, Sir!

ROEBUCK Faith, Madam, I know not, unless St. Patrick sent them a packing with other venomous Creatures out of *Ireland*. Nothing that carries a Sting in its Tongue can live there.⁸

Love and a Bottle was not a play that was likely to succeed in Dublin in 1699. The conservative, puritan tendency of the Irish gentry had left them, paradoxically, ahead of the times; the neo-puritanism demanded by the rising mercantile classes in England, and articulated by Jeremy Collier in his pamphlet *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaness of the English Stage* (1698), is exactly what had always been demanded and delivered to the Theatre of the Irish Gentry. Farquhar's first play was not one to satisfy such an audience: it looks back to the indecent comedies so popular in London after 1670, and it was this certainty of rejection, as well as the possibility of a greater audience and profit, that drove Farquhar to London with it. Nor was it very popular in London; the day of such a play was over, and Farquhar quickly realized that, changed his material to suit his audience, and soon achieved a brilliant success.

⁸ George Farquhar, *Love and a Bottle*, in *The Complete Works of George Farquhar* ed. by Charles Stonehill (New York: Gordian Press, 1967), I. 1. p. 14.

Restoration Theatre in Dublin:

Charles II was restored to the throne of England in May 1660, and almost immediately he gave orders to re-open the theatres that had been shut during the Commonwealth. Thomas Davenant and Thomas Killigrew were given patents to open two theatres in London and were mounting productions by November of that year. Davenant, in a fast move that shows the importance of Dublin as the second city of the three kingdoms, got permission on the 26th of November 1660 to open one theatre in Dublin, and at the same time got himself appointed Master of the Revels for Ireland, thereby reifying the position that Wentworth had unofficially created for Ogilby in 1638. The warrant that grants the patent to Davenant overturns the Puritan attitude to the theatre and insists on its harmlessness and usefulness. It authorises 'such public presentations of tragedies and comedies for the harmless recreation and divertisement of our own subjects',⁹ but then sounds a note of appeasement to those who might be inclined to disapprove: 'with a strict injunction that all such tragedies and comedies shall be purged and freed from all obscenity and profaness and so become instructive to morality in our people'.¹⁰

Ogilby's theatre in Werburgh Street 'fell to utter ruin by the Calamities of those times' after its closure in 1641,¹¹ probably due to vandalism by Puritan supporters rather than acts of war; Dublin had largely escaped the destruction suffered by the rest of the country on account of the Duke of Ormond's timely surrender of the city to the forces

⁹ 'Manual Warrant to the Lords Justices,' 26, Nov. 1660, in *Calendar of the State Papers for Ireland, 1660-1662*, ed. by R. P. Mahaffy (HM Stationery Office, 1905), p. 99.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 99.

¹¹ 'Petition by John Ogilby for the grant of Office', Stockwell, page 23.

of Parliament. Ogilby, however, promptly appealed Davenant's Warrant on the grounds that he had been appointed Master of the Revels for Ireland by the Earl of Strafford and had expended 'great preparations and disbursements in building a new Theatre, stocking and bringing over a Company of Actors and Musicians and settling them in Dublin'.¹² Davenant's grant was revoked and the office of Master of the Revels in Ireland royally bestowed on Ogilby, with the added proviso that, while Davenant had only been authorised to open one theatre, Ogilby was given permission to erect 'such Theatre or Theatres as to him shall seem most fit'.¹³

He began to build his theatre at Orange St. or Smoke Alley, (which soon waggishly became known as 'Smock' Alley because of the secondary industry the playhouse engendered)¹⁴, the first purpose-built Restoration theatre in the three kingdoms, with sliding scenery, music gallery above the stage, and, crucially, a proscenium arch. This was an innovation brought from the royal theatres of France, especially that of Richelieu at the Palais-Royal in Paris. The theatre was paid for and owned by the Ascendancy. Ogilby and Sir Thomas Stanley, the knight of Grangegorman – 'a Cambridge man who had translated *The Clouds* of Aristophanes', according to S.C. Hughes¹⁵ – raised the money to build it by subscription from the Irish Gentry, and even the bishops subscribed, according to Patrick Adair, a Presbyterian commentator, 'though they

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹³ 'Warrant for the issue to John Ogilby of a patent to the Office,' *Signet Docquet Books*, Index 6813, (London: Public Record Office, March 1660/1), p. 4; in Clark, *Early Irish Stage*, Appendix A, p. 180.

¹⁴ John Dunton, letter no. 6 from Dublin: 'Stands in a dirty street called Smock Alley, which I think is no unfit name for a place where such great opportunities are given for making smock bargains'; in Edward McLysaght, *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century* (Cork: University Press, 1939; repr. Shannon: Irish University Press, 1969), page 384.

¹⁵ S.C. Hughes, *The Pre-Victorian Drama in Dublin* (Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1904), p. 3.

refused at the time to give countenance or assistance for building a church at Dame Street, where there was a great need'.¹⁶

The old theatre at Werburgh Street had had one box, for the Viceregal party; the new one had a whole tier of them encircling the auditorium for the attending gentry, who could also sit in the pit on padded benches, or, at a later date, on the stage. For discreet clergymen, or ladies who did not wish to sit openly in a box, nor trust in the disguise of a 'vizard mask', there were screened boxes, called 'lattices', built into the sides of the proscenium arch, available for hire when not needed for balcony scenes. In line with the improving and educational tone of the original warrant, two upper galleries were provided for seating the less-well-off, although inflation over the period of the Commonwealth had caused the cheapest price of admission to rise from a penny to a shilling, making attendance quite expensive.

We may conclude from the seating arrangements that the Gentry were attending in great numbers and anxious to make an impact with their private boxes, that the ladies were out in force, and that the lower-classes were catered for by the provision of two galleries but discouraged by the high price of admission. Most of the upper galleries appear to have been occupied by servants, footmen and students from Trinity College, and fights between the different factions were a regular occurrence. The Castle ascendancy still controlled the theatre, but they are sharing their playground with the lower classes in the galleries for financial as well as social reasons.

¹⁶ Richard Bagwell, *Ireland under the Stuarts and during the Interregnum*, 3 vols (London: The Holland Press, 1909-1916; repr. 1963), I, p. 104.

So popular was the upper gallery that it collapsed due to overcrowding. On Saint Stephens' Day of 1670, when Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* was playing, the upper gallery fell, bringing down the lower gallery with it, on top of the Viceroy's box; four people were killed. The *London Gazette* reported in January 1671:

The upper Galleries on a sudden fell all down, beating down the Second, which together with all the people that were in them, fell into the Pit and lower Boxes. His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, with his Lady, happened to be there, but thanks be to God escaped the danger without any harm; part of the Box where they were remaining firm, and so resisting the fall of what was above; only his two Sons were found quite buried under the Timber; the younger had received but little hurt, but the eldest was taken up dead to all appearance, but having presently been let blood, and other remedies being timely applied to him, he is at present past all danger.¹⁷

There was great rejoicing among the Puritans at the fall of the gallery, and their joy was compounded by the fact that the gallery fell during the scene where a Puritan clergyman was being mocked and put in the stocks. 'Such providences', thunders Patrick Adair, 'so circumstantial in divers respects, will not pass without the observation of impartial and prudent persons, for surely they have a language if men would hear.'¹⁸

The three tiers of Dublin society are caught in these incidents: the commoners crowding in to look on from a distance at the glittering Ascendancy frolicking in their theatre, and the Puritans, their teeth now drawn, watching with intent disapproval from outside.

The balance of power had permanently shifted. The Old Irish were finished as a political or military force, and the Catholic Old English were terminally damaged; the

¹⁷ Clark, *Early Irish Stage*, p. 70. Lord Berkeley was Viceroy at the time.

¹⁸ Bagwell, p. 104.

future belonged to the New Protestant Ascendancy that consisted of the New English colonists and such of the Old English and native Irish who had converted. This new aristocracy was defined by its membership of the official Reformed Church, which was at that time the badge of a modern, enlightened, attitude. The speaker of the new Irish Parliament summoned in 1664, Sir Audley Mervyn, congratulated the members, in his inaugural address, on their success in finally turning the Irish Catholic wilderness into an English Protestant garden:

I may warrantably say, since Ireland was happy under an English Government, there was never so choice a collection of Protestant fruit that ever grew within the walls of the Commons House.¹⁹

The people who attended the Parliament dominated the Theatre; their social and political life merged seamlessly, and it is no surprise to find their political concerns expressed on the Dublin stage. The tradition of political theatre in Dublin continued unabated. Mountjoy had used *Gorboduc* in 1601 to signal support for the succession of James I; James Shirley had created a myth for the colonists in *Saint Patrick for Ireland*, and Henry Burnell had articulated, in *Landgartha*, a disgruntled opinion on the treatment of the Old English. The Dublin theatre was not just a place of entertainment, but a stage on which the consciousness of the English colonists in Ireland was debated and created.

The new theatre at Smock Alley carried right on with this tradition. The opening of a theatre was in itself a political declaration of support for the royalist cause, and the royal

¹⁹ *Gilbert's History of Dublin*, III, p. 60.

Warrant that granted permission for it expressed support and approval for the venture, and allowed the theatre to be styled 'Royal'. John Dunton, in his letter from Dublin, identifies the theatre as a royalist activity: 'The theatre is applauded by a modern gentleman for the representation of those things which so mightily promote virtue, religion, and monarchical government.'²⁰ The segregation by boxes overturned the egalitarianism of the Commonwealth and re-instituted the hierarchy of aristocracy, and the use of a proscenium arch expressed architecturally its links to the Royal Theatres of France, and the Whitehall masques designed by Inigo Jones.

In spite of the extended seating for the lower classes, however, and an increasing attendance by them, the absence of a solid audience of middle-class citizens left the Smock Alley Theatre in the grip of the Castle Set.

This was made manifest in the production of *Pompey* in February 1663. This translation of *Le Mort de Pompeé* by Corneille, was by Katherine Philips, who had arrived in Ireland after the Restoration trailing a reputation as a poet and ardent royalist. Her husband had been a supporter of Cromwell, but she had maintained the opposite belief all through the period of the Commonwealth. She and her husband had their eye on an Irish estate, but they must have decided she would cut a better figure alone, rather than accompanied by a known Cromwellian husband, while she insinuated herself into Dublin society. Apart from the husband, she was ideally suited to the tastes of the Castle set, and soon had achieved intellectual leadership of this society. 'She had exactly the

²⁰ McLysaght, p. 384.

qualities required by Ormond 'in creating a cultured viceregal court to manifest the splendour of the monarchy,' Morash observes.²¹

Mrs. Philips introduced to Ormond's court the 'Society of Friendship', a sort of Platonic game or cult, which drew for its inspiration on the platonic craze that had spread from Paris and infected the court of Charles I. It had, by this time, died off in both those places but Katherine Philips introduced it at Dublin, where it seems to have been all the rage for a while, possibly because many of the courtiers at the Castle were already familiar with it from their time spent in exile; it fitted perfectly into their artistic preference for the ideal rather than the real, which also informed their taste for Heroic Tragedy.

The members of the Society wrote to and addressed each other by assumed classical names, drawn from the French Romantic novels of the mid-seventeenth century, and aimed at developing and maintaining an intense but purely spiritual relationship between its members. Katherine Philips herself was always referred to as 'the matchless Orinda', Sir Edward Dering as 'the noble Silvander', Lady Dungannon as 'the excellent Lucasia', and so on. One of those to come into the ambit of the Society of Friendship was Roger Boyle, Baron Broghill and later first Earl of Orrery. He had known the Cult of the Platonic while a young gallant at the Court of Charles I and during his youth spent in Paris. He and his brother were supposed to be studying at the University there, but his father was not convinced; a letter is extant in the Lismore papers from his

²¹ Morash, p. 22.

brother, Lewis, to their father, the first Earl of Cork, denying the charge of time-wasting on his own behalf, but pointedly silent on his brother's:

As concerning my reading of Romances and Playbooks, I never (thanks be to God) have been much inclined unto them before your Lordships commands to ye contrary.²²

Broghill was definitely 'inclined unto them', so much so that he published a huge Romantic novel himself, called *Parthenissa*, in six volumes, first published at Waterford, in 1654, which had a remarkable success, perhaps as a novelty, as such things were rare in English.²³

In France, the cult of the Romantic Platonic revolved around the Court of Louis XIII, and it was a convention of the genre that the heroes of the books, though set at some remote period or location, should be thinly disguised versions of the 'seigneurs and great ladies of the court of Louis XIII masquerading in Macedonian raiment'.²⁴ In *Polexandre* (1629) Gomberville wrote a recognizable portrait of Cardinal Richelieu as the hero, and the novels of Madeleine and Georges de Scudéry from 1641 to 1654,

formed the chief topic of conversation and of correspondence in the literary society which gathered at and around the Hotel de Rambouillet, and in the personages of Mlle de Scudéry's romances could be recognized all the famous leaders of that society.²⁵

²² Lismore Papers, 2nd ser. III, 278; Clark, 'Historical Preface', in *Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*, p. 7.

²³ The tiresome length of *Parthenissa* is caustically commented on by the *Dictionary of National Biography*, II, p. 1033:

'The writer of the notice of Orrery in *Biographia Britannica* attributes the neglect of the romance to its remaining unfinished, but finished it certainly was, and if it had not been, its tediousness would not have been relieved by adding to its length.'

²⁴ 'Louis Joseph Ferdinand Herold' in *Encyclopedia 1911*,
<http://71.1911encyclopedia.org/H/HE/HEROLD_LOUIS_JOSEPH_FERDINAND.htm> [accessed 04/03/2003] (p. 2 of 6).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, [accessed 04/03/2003] (p. 3 of 6).

This was the cult of Romantic affectation that ‘the matchless Orinda’ introduced to Dublin, but there was another influence also at work on the drama that the exiles had brought back with them from the Continent. The plays of Corneille, which also exhibited to a lesser degree the platonic influence, were hugely popular. Their insistence on noble idealism, the excellence of the aristocratic code in the face of hopeless odds, meeting every challenge and overcoming every obstacle by applying their self-conscious aristocratic moral system, was designed to evoke the approbation of their peers and astonish their audience by the exalted virtue of their heroes and heroines, and create an example for posterity. All the restored aristocrats, from the king down, wanted to see this fashionable French-court theatre transposed into English.

Katherine Philips’ cult of Friendship is a further development of the cult of affectation and the ideal world of the French plays. It may also be an attempt to civilize the goatish men of the Restoration, as the women and troubadours tried to do in medieval Provence – to create an ideal mannered world of civilized social intercourse and discourse which is mapped out in the mental rather than sensual faculties, to create a space in which men and women could socialize without the constant interference of sexual impulses. Platonic affectation invaded conversation and literary expression, and created a highly artificial cast of mind and a rigid formula for social intercourse between the two sexes – a societal correlative to Heroic Tragedy. It was thus described by a visitor to the Court of Charles I in 1634:

There is a Love called Platonic Love which much sways there of late. It is a Love abstracted from all corporal gross impressions and sensual appetite,

but consists in contemplations, and ideas of the mind, not in any carnal fruition.²⁶

Orinda's asexual platonics dovetails perfectly into the world of the Heroic Tragedies; they both create an artistic space where ideas and emotions could move and mingle independently of any physical expression, any 'carnal fruition'. Friendship is seen as the purest relationship; all the virtues are subservient to it, and pressed into its service. Orrery writes in *The Generall*: 'Know Friendship is a greater tie than blood.'²⁷ Since love is removed from sex, the object of the emotion can be of any gender, the verbal expression does not entail any physical involvement. Argument becomes the meeting ground of civilized human beings, and verbal actions – the duel of wit and teasing out of moral conundrums - replaces plot.

The Smock Alley production of *Pompey* grew in the making. Katherine Philips had already started work when Orrery got to hear of it. She wrote in a letter of August 1662: 'By some Accident or another my Scene of *Pompey* fell into his Hands, and he was so pleas'd to like it so well, that he sent me the *French Original*.'²⁸ From this we may conclude that she had been writing her own play of that name, perhaps based on Corneille, but Orrery prevailed on her to translate the original.

Orrery had already finished his first play, *The Generall*, also called *Altemera*, by the command of the King, if Orrery's account is to be believed. Morrice, who was Orrery's chaplain and biographer, tells of a discussion between the king and courtiers as to

²⁶ Clark, intro. to *The Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery*, p. 12.

²⁷ Orrery, *The Generall*, I. 3. 297, in *Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*.

²⁸ Morash, p. 23.

whether the French fashion of rhymed couplets would work in English, and Orrery being decidedly of the opinion that it would. Orrery's biographer writes: 'And his majesty being willing a trial should be made, commanded his lordship to employ some of his leisure that way, which my lord readily did.'²⁹ Orrery wrote the play in the winter of 1660 while laid low by a fit of gout, as he did all his plays. At the beginning of 1661 he had completed *The Generall* and had sent it for approval both to the King, and the new Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Ormond, but it had not been published or produced. He writes of it with his usual false humility:

When I had the honour and happiness the last time to kiss his majesty's hand, he commanded me to write a play for him. [...] Some months after I presumed to lay at his majesty's feet a tragi-comedy, all in ten feet of verse and rhyme [...] because I found his majesty relished the French fashion of plays, than English.³⁰

Orrery was doing as Mountjoy and Wentworth had done: using the drama to attract attention to himself in Whitehall and to curry favour with the king. He was attracted to Philips' *Pompey* because of the French connection, the tragedy of *admiration* they were used to in France, and the King's known penchant for rhymed tragedy.

Orrery was greatly in favour of Orinda also producing a translation from the French, 'in ten feet of verse and rhyme', and his interest and enthusiasm for the project led it to becoming something of an Ascendancy circus. He personally donated £100 for the elaborate costumes, a huge sum that transformed the occasion into a gala event. According to Clark, he prevailed on his influential friends also to become involved, but

²⁹ Clark, 'Historical Preface', in *Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*, p. 23.

³⁰ Orrery to Ormond, in *CSPI*, 1660-1662; Morash, p.14.

this could equally have been because of the freemasonry of the 'Society of Friendship'. The Earl of Roscommon wrote a Prologue, Sir Edward Dering an Epilogue, and the songs were composed by other members of the Society or their dependants. The dances were choreographed by Ogilby himself, and Morash speculates that a 'military dance' may have been performed by soldiers from the Castle garrison. There is the further possibility that, as Philips added masques and intervals to the play at several points, some of the gentlemen and ladies may also have appeared in these. They were much given to appearing in private theatricals and masques; Queen Anne used to appear drunk, in a short skirt, in Masques at Court, and Orrery's wife, Margaret Howard, during the reign of Charles I, had 'played an important role in the last Caroline masque at Whitehall, D'avenant's *Salmacida Spolia*'.³¹ This event at Smock Alley had become the nearest thing to a parish concert the Ascendancy could generate, and there is a suggestion that 'Orinda' Philips herself appeared on the stage that afternoon. If she did, there is a good chance she persuaded some of her followers and Friends to accompany her.³²

The production had drifted a long way from the austerity of Corneille, with the introduction of spectacular masques, dances and musical intervals, but the play itself and its translation are still full of interest. It is easy to see why it appealed to Orrery, a notorious trimmer himself, with its dissection of divided loyalty, its consideration of how a soldier can behave honourably in the event of a split at the very summit of the command structure. Orrery's story was that he had been apprehended by Cromwell in

³¹ Clark, *Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*, p. 10.

³² Chetwood tells us that the first performance after the Treaty of Limerick, 1691, when the theatre had been closed for three years, was a free performance of *Othello*, in which the minor male roles were taken by officers from the Castle, and that the young people of the Dublin *beau monde* presented a comedy in the Bishop's Palace near St. Patrick's Cathedral; Clark, *Early Irish Stage*, p. 99.

London while on his way to visit Charles II in France and given the choice of spending the rest of his life in the Tower of London or serving Parliament by commanding its army in Ireland. The play gives form to the view that a subordinate, (Ptolemy), can never know which is the right way to jump, (towards Caesar or Pompey), until long after the event, and when the dust has settled, success justifies and failure condemns his actions. Ptolemy says:

Let's no more debate what's Just and fit
But to the World's vicissitudes submit.³³

At the end of the play, in one of the departures from Corneille's original, Mrs. Philips inserts a masque where the Egyptian priests summarise the lessons of the play for the contemporary audience:

Then after all the Blood that's shed,
Let's right the living and the dead:
 Temples to Pompey raise;
Set Cleopatra on the Throne;
Let Caesar keep the World h'has won;
 And sing Cornelia's praise.³⁴

In Corneille's play, this final speech is given by the victorious Julius Caesar, not by a normalising chorus, and it is he who majestically closes the action by raising Cleopatra to the throne and deifying Pompey.³⁵ He imposes his will on the survivors and on the dead. There is no question of anyone allowing him to keep 'the world h'has won'; he

³³ Morash, p. 27.

³⁴ Morash, p. 29.

³⁵ Corneille, *Pompeé*, ed. Pierre Lievre, Théâtre Complet, 2 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque NRF de les Pléiade, 1950), I, p. 1054:

Couranne Cléopâtre et m'apaise Pompeé,
Elève a l'une un trône, a l'autre des autels,
Et jure a tous les deux des respects immortels.

holds it by right of victory. In Philips' version, the use of an Egyptian chorus expresses a communal voice, and it is not the voice of the winners. It acknowledges the undoubted victory of Caesar, but also evokes the possibility of dissension by advising against it.

This is no part of Corneille's text, but an addition by Philips in order to appeal to her immediate audience. The burden of this chorus is a loser's apologia: let's forget the old quarrels, they sing, and humanely implement the new arrangements – a message which was intensely relevant and political in Dublin, a garrison town full of equivocally loyal soldiers, in 1662. It is a position which Orrery himself articulates in *The Generall*: 'For nought is virtue which success does want.'³⁶

Of the aristocratic audience watching *Pompey* on its opening night, the Duke of Ormond and the Earl of Orrery stood at two opposing poles. Ormond, the newly re-appointed Lord Lieutenant, was the leading member of the Old English aristocracy, whose pedigree and roots in the country stretched back to the middle ages. He was an instinctive royalist who had behaved honourably throughout the traumatic years of Civil War and Commonwealth. He had commanded the Royalist forces in Ireland, and after their defeat, had gone, at colossal expense to himself, into exile in France with Charles II. His loyalty to the Stuarts was never shaken or questioned. Orrery, in contrast, was the son of the newly created Earl of Cork who had bought his title of Baron Broghill for his son at an early age, and tried to buy him the best education that was available. Orrery stood at the opposite end of the Irish aristocracy from Ormond on the great question of loyalty. For Ormond it was absolute, for Orrery, conditional; Ormond belonged to the old school, Orrery to the new one that removed two legitimate kings

³⁶ Orrery, *The Generall*, I. 1. 179.

from the throne by force within fifty years, and could still claim legitimacy for the usurpers. Orrery had changed sides when Parliament had gained the upper hand and had become one of its leading supporters, a member of its Cabinet Council, and a friend of Oliver Cromwell, until it became clear that the democratic experiment was not going to work, when he switched back again in order to ingratiate himself with the incoming regime. To Orrery, expediency and personal advancement, hidden in the cloak of patriotism, were the extent of his ethical system. The proposition to forget the past and accept present loyalties at face value, which 'Orinda' Philips sought to invoke on behalf of her husband's expectations, was also needed by Orrery if he was to put his indiscretions behind him and achieve success in the new order. The subtext of the additions which Philips added to Corneille contradicts the main theme of the play and asserts that politics cannot be conducted along Corneillean lines. Honour, it is saying, must yield to pragmatism in the real political world. This is a variation that vanishes completely in the development of the Heroic Tragedy. At this stage, though, the Heroic play still had some slight grip on reality, and the theme of the necessity of obliterating the past in order to manage the present is one which Orrery also addresses in his first play, *The Generall*, the first original Heroic Play in English to find its way on to the stage.

Orrery invented the genre of the English Heroic Tragedy with *The Generall*; its main theme is the irreconcilable demands of Love and Honour. Clark's summing up of the dramatic method of that play applies equally to all of Orrery's Heroic plays:

The Generall shows a love duel conducted along the most scrupulously pure lines, and he concentrated especially upon the depiction of the discipline administered to the minds and emotions of the principal actors by their faithful allegiance to love, which he conceived as a metaphysical passion that finds its deepest happiness in the intangible rewards of spiritual merit.

37

More interesting is the fact that Orrery sets his plays against a background of constant war. This enabled him to consider more political matters than Love and Honour, and this extra dimension was accepted in his own time as an important part of his work. John Crowne, a contemporary and admirer of his, salutes 'the soldier and statesman in you [...] that of your poetry is so large a theme'.³⁸ In *The Generall* this military backdrop gave him space to lament the loss of the clarity and cleansing effect that action brings, to bemoan the quagmire of political choice, and to expose and examine the quandaries and compromises that a political soldier is faced with, and also to plead to the betrayed monarch and his Viceroy for understanding and forgiveness.

Pompey was an extraordinarily communal affair, and it obviously struck a chord with the audience, and introduced the Heroic strain that continued to hold its appeal on the Dublin stage for a long time. If we were to think that the plays presented to a society reflect that society we should judge Restoration Dublin to be a hot-bed of virtue, and the Society of Friendship would indicate a place of high-minded friendship and heroic nobility. This was not the case.

The image or model that Orrery was erecting for the new Ascendancy was a heroic, epic one. They were, by implication, Titans, charged with the epic task of carving a

³⁷ Clark, 'Historical Preface' in *The Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*, p. 29.

³⁸ John Crowne, preface to his play *Juliana*; in *Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*, p. 46.

civilization out of a wilderness, and it was their inherent nobility, honour and moral superiority which gave them the right and strength to succeed. Macaulay quotes Lord Clarendon, in wonder at their superhuman success in imposing order on Irish wildness:

Which is more wonderful, all this was done and settled within little more than two years, to that degree of perfection that there were many buildings raised for beauty as well as use, orderly and regular plantations of trees, and fences and inclosures raised throughout the kingdom.³⁹

In his own opinion, Orrery himself was a prime example of these paragons, but this high-toned image of aristocracy in either England or Ireland, is false. Neither he nor they measured up to the stratospheric heights of honour and nobility he posited. Samuel Butler observed that though no age ‘ever abounded more with those Images (as they call them) of Moral and Heroical Virtues, there was never any so opposite to them all in the mode and Custom of Life’.⁴⁰

Dunton remarked ironically that the Dublin theatre promoted:

virtue, religion and monarchical government, for my part I thought vice which fundamentally destroys all those things is here as well as in other theatres so charmingly discovered, as to make men rather love than hate it.⁴¹

Ormond’s influence kept Dublin to a higher level of behaviour and morality than London, as is indicated by the Mary Ware affair, a notorious abduction and rape case

³⁹ Thomas Babington Macauley, ‘Sir William Temple’, in *Critical and Historical Essays*, 2 vols (London: JM Dent & Sons, 1907), I, p. 213

⁴⁰ Clark, ‘Critical Preface’ in *Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*, p. 64.

⁴¹ Dunton, letter no. 6, McLysaght, p. 384.

from 1668, which caused public outrage and swift action.⁴² The collapse of the Smock Alley gallery on to Lady Clanbrassil, who functioned as an aristocratic courtesan, produced a stream of invective from Adair and other dissenters. The Earl of Orrery was a luminary of the aristocratic set, a Platonist and a writer of Heroic Tragedy, but his private life is not reflected in his plays. For all his platonic posturing and literary humility, for all his protesting about friendship as the highest emotional tie, his private and public life ran in the opposite direction. The image of aristocratic life and society he shows in his plays is a far cry from his own.

Orrery had a pathetic trust in the paper record: he believed that if he controlled that, his place in politics and posterity was secure. 'Let me therefore be believed an honest man, till I am proved to be otherwise,' he wrote to Ormond,⁴³ confident that he could edit the record to his own advantage. He wrote plays, poems, and correspondence with one eye on Whitehall and the other on posterity. It is a canon of concealment, literature as dissimulation and affectation. The paper record he leaves is one of religious high-mindedness, disinterested patriotism, semi-religious reverence for the king, valued friendships and heroic honour. But his true character is revealed in his actions, in the accounts of his contemporaries, and even leaks through his own writing at times.

⁴² *CSPI*, 1666-69, p. 566. A notorious case of abduction and rape carried out in an attempt to force the heiress Mary Ware to marry a certain Shirley, for which she had him charged in the courts. Shirley fled when arraigned and his estates were confiscated and sold; he fled to England and succeeded sufficiently in ingratiating himself at Whitehall as to lobby for the return of his estates. His last mention in the State Papers is in a letter by the sheriff claiming that he has returned, and requesting instructions as to whether or not he is to be apprehended. The answer has not survived.

⁴³ Donald D. Deignan, *The Ormond-Orrery Conflict, 1640-1680: A study in mid-seventeenth-century Irish society and politics*, 2 vols (Ann Arbor Michigan: UMI Dissertation Information Service, 1992), I, p. 739.

He was in his young days, according to one commentator, 'a formidable young tough, who took after his father'.⁴⁴ His conduct as a soldier was regarded as barbarous: at the siege of Waterford all who surrendered were promised clemency by him and then executed. He was also responsible for the transportation of thousands of Irish and Scots children and young people into slavery in the West Indies.⁴⁵ His conduct during the Civil War was stimulated by self-preservation and the enlargement of his own holdings and influence. What other royalists regarded as a catastrophe, he saw as an opportunity.

Orrery had argued, during the Commonwealth, that Cromwell should be crowned king; he set out his argument in a pamphlet published opportunely, just in time for the Restoration in 1660: *Monarchy asserted to be the best, most ancient and legal form of government, in a conference held at Whitehall with Oliver Lord Cromwell and a Committee of Parliament*.⁴⁶ But this argument was not bolstered by any loyalty to a particular king. After encouraging Cromwell to crown himself, he then turned around and in *The Generall* damned the usurper and exalted the rightful monarch.

THRASOLIN: That man who rules us now
 Is both a tyrant and usurper too.
 For when Evandor with the fight did fall
 That monster was the Armies Generall.⁴⁷

MELIZER: His guilty sword I slight.
 A tyrant never a true king could fight.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153, n. 145.

⁴⁵ *The Western People*, 13 March 2002:

'On the 14th of September, 1653, two English dealers supplying slaves to English planters entered into a written contract – which has been given to the world in the records – with the Commissioners for Ireland, by which 250 young women and 300 men of the Irish nation, to be found within twenty miles of Cork, Youghal, Kinsale, Waterford and Wexford, and who was the executor of this order? – the notorious Roger Boyle, who afterwards became Earl of Cork and Orrery. Orders went out for the seizure of man, woman and child in certain districts, the old men being hanged and the rest sold.' Archives, <<http://archives.tcm.ie/westernpeople/2002/03/storv6664.asp>> [accessed 24/02/2003] (p. 1 of 2).

⁴⁶ *D. N. B.* II, p. 1033.

⁴⁷ Orrery, *The Generall*, I. 1. 34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, IV. 6. 462.

THRASOLIN: A true king's virtue does dispense such light
That 'twas too glittering for a Tyrant's sight.⁴⁹

He was perfectly prepared to befriend Cromwell at the time and damn him afterwards. He exalted friendship as the highest virtue in his plays and in his correspondence, but ruthlessly pursued his own interests behind his supposed friends' backs. He protested the enormity of his regard for Ormond while at the same time plotting against him. Ormond remarked ironically of him: 'He will conclude with deep protestations of sincerity and friendship, wherein my confidence is somewhat abated.'⁵⁰

Orrery sent *The Generall* to Charles II, who passed it on to Killigrew, who, although he was Orrery's brother-in-law, did nothing about it for three years. Orrery also sent it to Ormond, the incoming Lord Lieutenant, with a covering letter claiming distinction as a royal favourite, and implying that the play be treated, therefore, as a document of importance. It is typical of Orrery's pushiness and lack of background that he would think that Ormond might be impressed by his access to the king. The play itself directly addresses the issue of allegiance by the General, Clorimun to a nameless usurper, and the proper attitude the restored rightful monarch should take to those who had betrayed him by reneging on their sworn loyalty. Orrery argues that expediency and the necessity of saving the country from the rebels had to take precedence over a useless withdrawal from public affairs:

THRASOLIN: Then your assistance bring
And save your sinking Country and your King.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, IV. 6. 481.

⁵⁰ Clark, *Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*, p. 45.

CLORIMUN: He's an usurper whom for King you own.
 THRASOLIN: I call him king because he fills the Throne
 [...]

But if for him you will not undertake
 This war, yet do it for your country's sake.
 Your sinking country which on you does call,
 Who we are certain can prevent our fall.⁵¹

Orrery was the most notable of the Irish turncoats, but he was not the only one. He speaks for a large section of the New English Ascendancy when he advises leniency and oblivion, and dramatically pledges their allegiance to the restored rightful king:

Your subjects [...]

Have sent me to acquaint you in their name

Their joy, that in your lawful throne you sit.

To their true sovereign gladly they submit.⁵²

Since in a Tyrant's cause we prospered so,
 In a true King's our swords should wonders do.
 On the wrong side we know how we can fight.
 Let's prove now we can do it on the right.⁵³

And Melizer, the Restored rightful king, in Orrery's wishful scenario, forgives his erring subjects for their treason, without even being asked:

MELIZER: You that such news have brought
 Deserve a pardon sure for any fault.
 My mercies still shall be to those more great
 Which to it trust, and for it do not treat.
 Past faults I'll never to remembrance bring,
 For which the word I give you of your king.⁵⁴

Orrery expects that he and the others in his position will be forgiven without the humiliation of having to beg for it, because of the services they have rendered in

⁵¹ Orrery, *The Generall*, IV. 2. 330.

⁵² *Ibid.*, V. 1. 400.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, IV. 2. 92.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, V. 1. 407.

bringing about the Restoration. He had made a bad miscalculation in throwing his lot in with Cromwell and Parliament; he never expected the Stuarts to return. He knows now that he jumped too soon, pursuing his own advantage. Charles II, Ormond and the other loyal royalists know it too. Orrery spent the rest of his life paying for it: they were willing to make use of him, just as the Cromwellians did, but they never trusted him completely. Orrery is quite open in the play about his position and his justification, and he was so anxious to get his point of view into public discourse that, in response to Killigrew's tardiness, he organized a private production of *The Generall* at his home in Thomas Court in Dublin on the 18th of October 1662 for, as the London newspaper, *Mercurius Publicus* reported, 'the Lord Lieutenant and most of the persons of Honor in these parts'.⁵⁵ In February of the following year he disseminated his ideas to a wider audience by public performance at Smock Alley, two weeks after *Pompey* had spelled out the same message.⁵⁶ And finally he got the play produced by his brother-in-law, Thomas Killigrew, at the Theatre Royal in London in September 1664, under its alternative title, *Altemera*.⁵⁷

In *The Generall* he claims that his actions were motivated by the highest reasons, and that it was a better choice, a lesser evil, to defend the country under Cromwell against the rebels, than to refuse to serve the usurper and lose the country to the rebels, and that the king has actually gained greatly by his disloyal actions: the kingdom of Ireland has been saved for him by Orrery. While the play is justifying his apostasy during the Civil War, at the same time it displays an undercurrent of resentment against an ungrateful

⁵⁵ Clark, *Early Irish Stage*, p.58.

⁵⁶ Morash, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Clark, *Early Irish Stage*, p. 59.

monarch, who did not honour his obligations and recognize the General's worth, after what he had done for him, and who passed over him for preferment, just as Charles did by appointing Ormond over Orrery:

CLORIMUN: He's an ungrateful man, and well you know
 'Tis not his Love but Fear, which courts me now.
 [...]
 THRASOLIN: Denying you your due,
 He wrong'd himself more than he injured you.⁵⁸

Orrery did not attend Ormond's triumphal return to Dublin as Lord Lieutenant. He had been relieved of his Lord Justiceship, returned to Munster, and there been detained by a politic fit of the gout.

Orrery's lack of pedigree – his father was the first Earl of Cork, elevated to the Irish peerage for his industrial, forest-clearing, and rebel-killing activities – seems to have been a source of discomfort to him. His plays treat of a closed society of aristocrats with noble minds and high ideals,⁵⁹ and he aspires to be one of them, sharing in full the elevated and noble thoughts and emotions, with no hint of any lesser activities except war. But for all his protestations, he was never fully accepted by the highest families in his own lifetime. Ormond wrote damningly of his flawed character: 'His vanity, ostentation, and itch to popularity are infirmities so notoriously known to be dominant in his nature'.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Orrery, *The General*, IV. 2. 334.

⁵⁹ Clark says in his 'Critical Preface' to Orrery's works (page 66) that the only character of lower rank appearing in it is Altemera's female servant, Candaces. He does not seem to be aware that Candaces is the son of the former king in disguise, and that he reveals his true identity at the end of the play. This role has to be for a male actor, and shows that there was still work after the Restoration for men in women's roles. Farquhar also wrote the part of Mrs. Mandrake in *The Twin Rivals* to be played by a male comedian. Conversely, it was not long before Peg Woffington made her mark in the trouser-role of Farquhar's Sir Harry Wildair.

⁶⁰ Clark, *Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*, p. 45.

Orrery also sent his next play, now lost, to Ormond, but he must have felt either that his arguments for oblivion had carried the day, that Ormond was unresponsive, or that the London stage was more enticing, because henceforth he focussed his work on the more important audience, the king himself and the Court at Whitehall, swearing undying friendship and regard for Ormond while scheming behind his back to provoke his downfall. Orrery's objective was to impress his aristocratic audience, not to create a work of art. He wanted to be admired and in the public eye, especially the king's, and in later years he kept changing his style in pursuit of this objective. He was sufficiently vain and self-deluded to think he had done so with great success. His other dramas continued to mine the vein, introduced in *The Generall*, of Love versus Honour, until his audience became very tired of it, and of the Heroic Tragedy in general, with its interminable debates and lack of action. Pepys remarked in his diary on the opening of Orrery's fifth Tragedy, *Tryphon*, on December the 8th 1668: 'For the very same design, and words, and sense and plot, as any one of his plays have, anyone of which alone would be held admirable, whereas so many of the same design and fancy do but dull one another.'⁶¹

Pompey and *The Generall* show the importance of the role the theatre played in the formation of Anglo-Ascendancy consciousness and attitudes, and its contribution to public debate in Post-Restoration Ireland. The Duke of Ormond's contribution to the development of the Irish theatre was in a different area altogether. His efforts were bent

⁶¹ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, eds. Robert Latham & William Matthews, 11 vols (London: Bell & Hyman, 1976) III, 1668-9, p. 389.

on infusing the theatre with the pageantry of the court to create a public and dramatic spectacle; to him, the theatre was a branch of government and an instrument of policy.

The grandest of the *grands seigneurs* was James Butler, the first Duke of Ormond, who was re-invested as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1661, and who remained, whether in and out of office, by far the most influential Irishman of his day until his death in 1688. He was by nature conservative and wedded to the older ideas of aristocratic privilege, ideals and responsibilities. He wanted to build up the splendour and nobility of his viceregal court; he disliked London and was appalled by the licence of the Restoration era. His own life was heroic, and selflessly dedicated to the royal cause. *The Dictionary of National Biography* calculates that his single-minded espousal of the Stuarts cost him about a million pounds, in seventeenth century money, little of which was refunded. His conduct and character were exemplary, noted for steadiness and moderation rather than brilliance, and Charles' successor James II said of his rule as Viceroy:

It was the king that sent him thither, knowing his constant loyalty to the crown; and whoever gave the advice hath no reason to be ashamed of it; for he hath kept that kingdom in peace, which no other man could have done so well as he.⁶²

His influence at the court in London acted as a counterbalance to the prevailing corruption, and his effect at Dublin was far greater:

He had been noted for purity of life and purpose, and for unswerving devotion, even when such qualities were not rare at the court of Charles I. But in that of Charles II, he was almost the sole representative of the high-toned virtues of a nobler generation. By force of what is emphatically called

⁶² Deignan, *The Ormond-Orrery Conflict*, p. 743.

‘character’, far more than by marked ability, he stood alone. The comrade of Strafford, one who had willingly sacrificed a princely fortune for a great cause, he held aloof while persons like Bennet intrigued and lied for office, money or spite. His strict purity of life was a living rebuke to the Sedleys and Castlemaines, who turned the court into a brothel.⁶³

His loyalty and sense of duty were unwavering even in face of Charles’ capitulation to Buckingham’s Cabal and Orrery’s intrigue to have him removed from the position of Lord Lieutenant in 1669. In 1675, Charles re-appointed him with the words:

I have done all I can to disoblige that man, and to make him as discontented as others; but he will not be out of humour with me; he will be loyal in spite of my teeth; I must even take him in again, and he is the fittest person to govern Ireland.⁶⁴

Ormond insisted on the importance of monumental grandeur, and conducted his court with regal pomp and theatrical splendour. His entries and exits from Dublin Castle were deliberately filled with drums and fanfares, flags and the firing of great guns. The Calendar of State Papers for Ireland shows how carefully his first entry to Dublin after his re-appointment was choreographed. Different scenarios were planned depending on which side of the river he disembarked; the order of precedence, the nature and armaments of the troops, the drawing up of the regiments in the Castle Yard, the choice, number and timing of the ordnance to be fired, are all carefully laid out in advance, as well as who can approach his exalted personage on that day, and who is to be kept away from Dublin Castle.⁶⁵

⁶³ *D. N. B.* II, p. 510.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 511.

⁶⁵ *CSPI: 1660-62*, p.563.

Ormond's influence as a patron of the Theatre at Smock Alley was enormous. The theatre sheltered under his prestige; his regular attendance, and that of his family, helped to draw a fashionable crowd, but his influence extended even beyond that.

He tended to regard the Smock Alley players as his own company, just as Charles II did with The King's Company in London. He took the opportunity of bringing the Dublin company over to Oxford for a successful season, while he was Chancellor of the University in 1677 – the King's Company was barred for breaking windows the previous year. He also allowed the players to travel to Edinburgh in 1681 to present plays at Holyrood Castle before the future James II and Queen Anne. When Ormond went to Kilkenny during the summer, the players followed.⁶⁶

One of the playwrights of the period whose work has survived is John Dancer, who held a position in the household of Ormond's son, the Earl of Ossory, and who was, therefore, under the patronage of the Lord Lieutenant. Dancer had two of his plays performed at Smock Alley and later printed; they were *Agrippa, King of Alba; or, The False Tiberinus* (1666-1669), translated from Quinault, and *Nicomede* (1670), a translation of Corneille's play. *Agrippa* seems to have been a great favourite of Ormond's, and according to the publisher, he had the play performed by command several times.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ 'Since his grace the duke of Ormond went to Kilkenny the players with all their appurtenances strolled thither, to entertain the company there as they gave out, though everyone knows where the carrion is the crows will follow, for Dublin was then without much of the people that are usually in it, many of them in the summer retiring into the country.' Dunton, letter no. 6, Mc Lysaght, *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 385.

⁶⁷ Stockwell, p. 314, n. 68: 'Agrippa. King of Alba: or the False Tiberius. As it was several times Acted with great Applause before his Grace the Duke of Ormond then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, at the Theatre Royal in Dublin. From the French of Monsieur Quinault. London: Printed by J.C. for Nich. Cox, neer Castle Yard in Holbourn. 1675.'

When Ormond was removed from the Lord-Lieutenancy by the factions and intrigues around Charles II's Court in 1669, he returned to Dublin to a reception more tumultuous than that given to his incoming replacement as Viceroy. He may have been out of favour at Whitehall, but he continued to exercise as much influence in Ireland in his capacity as first peer of the realm. He also continued his interest and patronage of the theatre. Ormond's successor, Lord John Roberts, was of a puritan outlook, and on his appointment in 1669 he closed down Smock Alley Theatre. 'He stopped the public players, as well as other vicious persons', as Gilbert puts it.⁶⁸ In 1670, when Roberts was recalled and the theatre re-opened, John Dancer translated and presented Corneille's *Nicomede*, a dangerously political play, at Smock Alley.⁶⁹ *Nicomede* had been premiered at Paris nineteen years previously where the audience had seen parallels between it and the current situation in the country: the imprisonment for a year and eventual release of the Prince de Condé, who was the most prominent exponent of the consciously Heroic style of the '*noblesse d'épée*' in the teeth of Mazarin's drive to centralise all political control and authority. The character of Nicomede was seen to echo Condé, in his virtue, *générosité*, and ability to understand and forgive his imprisonment.

In Dublin in 1670 the political echoes in the play are equally apparent: the noble, virtuous Ormond has been deposed by the intriguing of a wretched cabal led by Buckingham and Orrery, who 'buzz it in your father's ears', as the play says of their

⁶⁸ Gilbert's *History of Dublin*, II, p. 68.

⁶⁹ Title page: *Nicomede*, A Tragi-Comedy, translated out of the French of Monsieur Corneille, by John Dancer. As it was Acted at the Theatre-Royal, Dublin...Licensed Dec. 16. 1670. Early English Books Online: <<http://www.wlib.umi.com/eebo/>> [3/11/2003]

constant rumour-mongering to the king.⁷⁰ He is still loved by the people, who are outraged at his treatment, but he has steadfastly refused to complain or manoeuvre against his enemies in return:

They may perhaps ensnare
Themselves, in those traps they for us prepare.
The People love you, and abhor their Arts,
And he Reigns safest who does Reign o'er Hearts. ⁷¹

He trusted to the king for justice, but was disappointed: 'I know he'll to the King for Justice call, but from that Justice he shall find his Fall,' says his main opponent.⁷² Throughout, Nicomede retains his equilibrium, and shows himself a man of virtue and nobility, and 'against such virtue there is no defence'.⁷³ Nicomede eventually triumphs over his enemies and reconciles them to him and to each other:

You should believe him worthy of my Faith,
I should disown him had he not a mind
Revenge can't animate nor passion blind,
Did not in him all that is generous dwell. ⁷⁴

So far all is fairly innocuous, but in dealing with the treatment of Nicomede by the king, both Corneille and Dancer are on dangerous ground. The play contains too much that can be construed as criticism of Charles' actions, and too accurate an evaluation of his weakness for yielding to whoever could apply the most pressure. It also could be seen as an uncomfortably accurate assessment of the standing of Ormond in Ireland; the king in

⁷⁰ *Nicomede*, I. 1. p. 3.

⁷¹ LAODICE, *Nicomede*, I. 2. p. 4.

⁷² *Nicomede*, I. 5. p. 11.

⁷³ ARSINOE, *Nicomede*, V. Last. p. 55.

⁷⁴ LAODICE, *Nicomede*, V. 7. p. 54.

the play says, ‘for you’re indeed king here, I’m but the shadow’⁷⁵ – an interesting reversal of the ‘reflection’ image usually invoked to describe the Viceroy’s position. The argument given by Corneille and Dancer against powerful subordinates is perhaps, not entirely to the taste of the Butlers:

That Subject must be false, who’s grown too high,
Although he never thought a Treachery.
Power, Sir, in Subjects is a Crime of State,
Which prudent Princes, ere it be too late,
By wisely clipping of their Wings, prevent
From meriting severer Punishment.⁷⁶

But this argument is more than balanced in the play by the repeated declaration of Nicomede’s *vertu*, and *générosité*:

Prince Nicomede’s thoughts are all so just,
‘Twere injury to virtue to mistrust.⁷⁷

I fear that virtue which to Rome he owes
Has taught him, there’s no Glory so sublime,
Can recompense the hazard of a Crime.⁷⁸

The play was published in London in 1671, not in Dublin as one would expect, and it lacks any dedication by Dancer. The short preface was inserted by the printer, and directed at Ormond’s son, the Earl of Ossory, ‘in the absence of the author.’⁷⁹ So it would seem that while Corneille and Dancer balanced the arguments for and against the cutting down of great men to prevent them falling on the State, such frankness was seen as a little too pushy. The simultaneity of Ormond’s temporary fall and the play’s

⁷⁵ PRUSIAS, *Nicomede*, II. 2. p. 16.

⁷⁶ ARASPES, *Nicomede*, II. 2. p. 14.

⁷⁷ ARASPES, *Nicomede*, II. 1. p. 12.

⁷⁸ ARSINOE, *Nicomede*, I. 5. p. 10.

⁷⁹ Title page, *Nicomede*, ‘printed for Francis Kirkman, and [...] to be sold at his Shop in *Thames-Street*, over against the *Custom-House*, 1671.’

appearing at Dublin is too close to be accidental, but Ormond is nowhere associated with the published play, except in the half-hearted effort of the printer, who plainly feels that this play should be of interest to the Butlers. Ormond chose not to be tied to the sentiments or charges which the play expresses, whether in his favour or not. Even while in disfavour with the king for six years, Ormond's loyalty and constancy did not waver.

Ormond fully appreciated the power of pageantry and the crucial part it played in bolstering the royal authority in Ireland, and he treated the theatre as part of that pageantry. He was aware, as Raymond Gillespie observes that 'it was necessary not only to reconstruct, but also to reimagine Ireland. One of the ways in which this expressed itself was in the development of state ritual.'⁸⁰

Ormond saw the country organically and holistically: he believed his role was to bring all sectors of the population into harmony with each other and into their proper and traditional allegiance to the Crown. This goal was complicated, however, by the absence from the country of the king, so Ormond had to burnish his own role and his Court to mimic as closely as possible the royal court and to dazzle with as much reflected brilliance as possible. As a protégée of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, Ormond was acutely aware of the importance of image in politics. In James Butler, first Duke of Ormond, we meet one of the most persistent Anglo-Irish themes in its full-blown form: that of the Ascendancy as a performance. He judged it necessary to create and maintain

⁸⁰ Raymond Gillespie, 'Political ideas and their social contexts', in, *Political Thought in Seventeenth-Century Ireland – Kingdom or Colony?* ed. by Jane H. Ohlmeyer (Cambridge: University Press, 2000) p. 123.

a regal role in the king's absence. He expended great efforts to achieve that end, in his pomp of court, his entrances and exits to the Castle and the City, his development of the cityscape, and his patronage of the theatre. Dunton wrote of the daily Dublin Castle ceremonies:

A foot company with three commissioned officers daily mount the guard, and whenever the government go out or come in they are received with colours flying and drums beating as the King is at Whitehall, and indeed the grandeur they live in here is not much inferior to what you see in London.⁸¹

Ormond believed that pageantry played an important part in forging the bond between the people and their king, with the Lord Lieutenant as the crucial link – the visible manifestation of the royal authority – the image of the king in the king's absence.

Like Wentworth and Mountjoy before him, Ormond arrogated the theatre as part of his own magnificence, and allowed it to shine with some of his prestige. So embedded had the theatre become in the political display that Robert Ware wrote in 1678, towards the close of Ormond's reign, that the authorities had foolishly allowed the public pomp of government to diminish and would need to compensate by further boosting the occasional pageantry of the theatre:

The Mayor and Aldermen ought to compensate so great a neglect of duty by resorting on [holy] days and festivals to the *King's Theatre* in their own Persons, and the causing a general resort of Freemen on these times to that place, besides an allowance to every of their Apprentices of twelve pence a piece to recreate themselves at these times at the *Theatre*, in lieu of these sports this City was bound to entertain them with.⁸²

⁸¹ John Dunton, letter no. 6; Mc Lysaght, p. 386.

⁸² MS. De Rebus Eblanae, 74, f. 175, in Clark, *Early Irish Stage*, p. 83.

A letter written from Dublin in 1687 tells us that the tradition was being kept up: 'My Lord Mayor was at the play, upon All Saints' Day, with his sword, mace and cap of maintenance.'⁸³ Orrery and Ormond shared the view of the theatre mirroring and enhancing aristocratic and viceregal prestige. Ormond donated his Coronation suit to the Smock Alley players, and Orrery gave £100 towards the costumes for *Pompey*.

The spectacular aspect of the theatre was significant, but the political was crucial, and its reach was greatly enhanced by the publication of the texts of plays. There are plays that survive only in manuscript or even by report; those which were printed were considered important enough in the context of public debate and education to be given to a wider audience. They took their place alongside pamphlets, tracts and broadsides in informing and shaping public opinion among those who spoke and read English; literacy appears to have been quite high in late seventeenth century Dublin. The quicker the plays were published and the more editions there were, the more important they were considered. *Pompey* was hurried into print, for example, as was *Landgartha*. Some plays were not written for production at all, but directly for publication. Raymond Gillespie points out that at this time Irish culture was in a transition from oral to written culture, and that this is evidenced by the fact that many of the polemic pamphlets are couched in a dialogue form.⁸⁴ There is also a genre of military memoirs cast in dramatic form dating from this period. Some of these, such as *A Royal Voyage*, or *The Royal*

⁸³ J. Thomson to Ellis, Dublin, 5 Nov. 1687, Ellis papers, British Library, cited in 'Letters of Lord Longford and others on Irish Affairs, 1689 -1702', in *Analecta Hibernica*, 32, 1985, 37-111 (p.40).

⁸⁴ Gillespie, 'Political ideas and their social contexts', p. 112.

Visit, are mere propaganda, using some personal knowledge of the wars to slander the Irish Catholics for their alleged atrocities during the rebellion of 1641 and the subsequent upheavals. *A Royal Voyage*, an anonymous polemic, for example states that its purpose is to expose

the perfidious, base, cowardly, bloody nature of the Irish, both in this and all past ages, [...] the worse than heathenish barbarities committed by them on their peaceable British neighbours in that bloody and detestable massacre and rebellion of 'Forty-one, which will make the nation stink as long as there is one bog or bog-trotter left in it.⁸⁵

Other plays are efforts to set the record straight, by bringing a personal narrative to the public notice, using the dramatic form that was widely known and read among the leaders of the new dispensation. The best examples of this are John Michelburne's and Henry Burkhead's plays. Burkhead used the interval of peace in 1644 to publish his play *Cola's Furie; or, Lirenda's Miserie*, a savage attack on the activities of Sir Charles Coote during the war, and a defence of the Irish Confederate position. The play was never acted⁸⁶ but was written primarily to be circulated and discussed. Michelburne's *Ireland Preserved*, a two-part work consisting of *The Troubles of the North* and *The Siege of Derry* appeared in 1692,⁸⁷ and is a good illustration of the power of play-publishing. Michelburne was the commander at the Siege of Derry, but fell on hard times afterwards, due, he felt, to inadequate appreciation of the importance and worth of his leadership. He first published his apologia in pamphlet form to draw attention to the injustice he felt had been done to him, but it was not until he cast his memoirs into dramatic form that he made any impact. He makes himself the hero of the plays, and

⁸⁵ Duggan, p. 74.

⁸⁶ La Tourette Stockwell, '*Lirenda's Miserie*', in *Dublin Magazine*, (July- Sept. 1930), 19-26 (p. 20).

⁸⁷ Published under this title in 1705, but appeared anonymously under the title *Piety and Valour; or, Derry Defended* in 1692.

claims a decisive role in the Siege and in the overall victory of William of Orange; he attempts to get the recognition he feels he deserves and the arrears of wages due to himself and his troops. This play was never meant for production, but for private publication and circulation. It is a document on the lines of Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, part propaganda, part news, part political tract and part local colour. It is full of maps and detailed descriptions of military actions, meant to be appreciated by other veterans and by influential members of the ruling elite. He probably wrote it to attract attention to his plight while in prison for debt. In fact, once in dramatic form, his justification lasted for centuries: the play had a very long life, being used as a school textbook in Ulster right up to the early twentieth century, and as a venerable playscript (published regularly in one volume with Ashton's *The Battle of Aughrim*) for Protestant children to re-enact the glories of their ancestors in preserving their freedom, religion and laws.

The publication and circulation of plays, which had become popular while the theatres were closed during the period of Puritan rule, was an important factor in the formation of public opinion among the English of Ireland; the coffee houses of Dublin were known as places where publications were read and debated. And apart altogether from those who attended the theatre, the text, by being read aloud, could reach many who could not read. Plays formed a crucial segment of the business of publication in the days before the rise of the novel. The Earl of Cork warned his sons off reading playbooks; Polly Peachum's father, in *The Beggar's Opera*, believes his daughter's head has been turned by reading their romantic nonsense; John Ogilby eagerly snatched the play she was reading from 'Orinda' Philips, and in William Philips' *St. Stephen's Green*, Bellmine recommends himself to the young ladies by claiming to have the latest

from London: 'New Fashions, New Tunes, and New Plays'.⁸⁸ The Duke of Ormond had in his library in 1685, Gillespie tells us, in addition to the works of Shakespeare and Jonson, forty-two volumes of plays by unnamed authors. By 1715, the library had grown to sixty-one such volumes, and seven of those listed in 1685 had been lent or given away, to circulate and spread their ideas among the Irish Ascendancy.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ William Philips, *St. Stephen's Green; or, The Generous Lovers*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: The Cadenus Press, 1979), I. 1. 75.

⁸⁹ Gillespie, 'Political Ideas and Their Social Contexts in Seventeenth-Century Ireland', p. 118

Chapter III

*The Generous and the
Mercenary;
or,
The Qualities of the
Quality*

William Philips' *St. Stephen's Green*; George Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle*.

Ormond's ideal of leading by example was crucially important in the development of the Ascendancy in late seventeenth century Ireland. Many of those now in the ascendant had risen suddenly to that position, and had little or no idea of the behaviour expected of gentlemen. Ormond commented caustically on the hurried advancement of those who had rushed to England in 1678 to swear false affidavits concerning the Popish Plot:

Those that went out of Ireland with bad English and worse clothes are returned well bred gentlemen, well coronated, periwigged and clothed. Brogues and leather straps are converted to fashionable shoes and glittering buckles: which [...] is a main inducement to bring in a shoal of informers.¹

This is a set of parvenus, he is saying, who imagine that money and fine clothes make a gentleman, and suggests that their behaviour and morality might, with more benefit, be looked to.

McLysaght, reviewing the state of the country in the latter years of the seventeenth century, observes:

The bulk of the wealth of the country was still in the hands of the landed aristocracy, if we can so describe a class which, as a result of the territorial upheaval following the advent of Cromwell, consisted of people whose origin was by no means aristocratic.²

The native Irish, for the most part, had revered the old gentry, Irish and Old English, but they inclined to despise the New English. They had been quite prepared to take the new overlords to their hearts, given a little encouragement, but the mentality of most of New

¹ Thomas Carte, *The Life of James, Duke of Ormond*, 6 vols (Oxford: University Press, 1851), IV, p. 386.

² McLysaght, p. 233.

English ascendancy was one of ruthless class and racial superiority over primitive aboriginals. The new gentry were not secure in their holdings until after the Treaty of Limerick, and few had any sense of aristocratic largesse. They were largely ex-soldiers or speculators who had advanced money to the Government during the war and were to be paid off with confiscated land. They had no roots in the country, no sense of place and no idea of tradition. They were strangers in a strange land, with a different language, religion and culture, who despised the original inhabitants.

The main complaint from Gaelic Ireland about the New Ascendancy is their lack of open-handed hospitality. The older gentry had been generous to the point of profligacy, but to begin with the newcomers were thrifty and parsimonious. Gaelic poetry of this period constantly inveighs against the meanness and lack of nobility of the new lords of the country, who have grabbed the best land from the exhausted Irish. Geoffrey Keating (Seathrún Cheitinn) calls them: 'foreign filth', brood of every foreign sow', and 'worthless rabble'³ and sneers at their lowly birth and the notion that nobility could be conferred by the Patent Rolls that granted them title to the confiscated estates:

There's a gang on the rise in the plains of Lugh the lithe
Born to be low, though they wave their 'rolls' on high;
But Eoghan's seed's exhausted, Tal's offspring deaf to our pleas,
And the youth of Banstrath scattered o'er the seas.⁴

³ Seathrún Cheitinn, *Om Sceol ar Ardmhagh Fáil*, 'brioscar bíobha' verse 1, line 2; 'ál gach cránach coigríche', Verse 2, line 8; 'treod gan tásc,' Verse 3, line 9,2.

<http://www.pgil_library/classics/Keating,G/htm> [accessed 12/12/2003]

⁴ *Ibid.* Verse 4. Atáid foirne ag fás san gclarsa Logha líofa
dar chóir bheith táir gé hard a rolla-scaoileadh
síol Eoghain tláith 's an Tálhuil bodhar cloite
's na hóig ón mBanstrath scaipthe I gcoigríochaibh.

The new masters, for the most part, were intent on establishing a society firmly based on race, class, and religion. In the years following Ormond's death, his vision was overturned and the racial and social superiority of the Protestant interest was built into a rigid caste system, in which religion and language were the prime signifiers. Corkery puts it bluntly: 'The first article in an Ascendancy's creed is, and always has been, that the natives are a lesser breed, and that anything that is theirs (except their land and their gold!) is therefore of little value.'⁵ By extension, the natives are of little value either. As the Protestant nation of Ireland came into being, the native population was relegated to the status of the other flora and fauna on the island, and had no part to play in the political or theatrical activities of the next fifty years. William Molyneux, the father of what J.G. Simms calls 'colonial nationalism', published in 1698 the clearest statement of the political claims of the English of Ireland, *The Case of Ireland's being bound by acts of parliament in England, stated*, in which the indigenous Irish have become politically invisible. Molyneux writes:

The great body of the present people of Ireland are the progeny of the English and Britons that from time to time have come over into this kingdom, and there remain but a mere handful of the ancient Irish at this day, I may say not one in a thousand.⁶

With the old Irish nobility broken, their land confiscated and the Brehon laws overturned, the political energy of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy was concentrated, not on the harmonious development of all the strands within the island, which had been Ormond's ideal, but on working out the relationship between the English of Ireland and

⁵ Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland*, p. x.

⁶ J.G. Simms, *Colonial Nationalism 1698-1776: Molyneux's The Case of Ireland...Stated* (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1976), p. 31.

the English authorities in London. Molyneux's tract was the statement of the position held by 'this nation', by which he meant the New English Protestant nation, (though he did broaden his argument, crucially, to include the descendants of the Norman Incursion). Molyneux denies the right of the English parliament to legislate for Ireland, or that the English House of Lords was the final arbiter in Irish legal matters. Like James Shirley's *St. Patrick for Ireland* in 1640, he rooted the claims of the seventeenth century colonists in the soil of Irish history in order to establish their legitimacy. He argued that, as the submission of the Irish rulers to Henry II in 1171 was voluntary, it granted to the Irish the same freedoms and rights as those enjoyed by the subjects of the king living in England, in particular the right to trade freely and to have a free parliament. He followed his friend Locke in stating 'that those who joined the conqueror in war were free of any subjection to him',⁷ and from this he deduced that even the Norman settlers and their descendants could by no means be treated as a conquered race. 'England may be said more properly to be conquered by William I than Ireland by Henry II,' he wrote.⁸ He insisted that the restrictions imposed on the country by the decrees of the newly aggressive English parliament over the previous fifty years were an invasion of Irish parliamentary rights and an attack on the rights and liberties which the Anglo-Irish had enjoyed for half a millennium. 'I have no other notion of slavery', he adds, 'but being bound by a law to which I do not give consent. If one law may be imposed without consent, any other law whatever may be imposed upon us without our consent. [...] To tax me without consent is little better, if at all, than downright robbing me.'⁹

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

The English parliament and Court were scandalised by Molyneux's book. Not the least part of its offence was that he had dedicated to King William himself a book which called into question the authority of the English parliament. The arguments he put forward were also roundly denounced. Isaac Newton said bluntly: 'Ireland is one of the English plantations [...] and is, and ought to be, inferior to this kingdom and subservient to its interests.'¹⁰ A committee appointed to investigate the matter concluded that Molyneux's book was part of an attempt

by the king's subjects of Ireland to shake off their subjection to and dependence on this kingdom [...] by denying the authority of the king and parliament of England to bind the kingdom and people of Ireland, and by denying the subordination and dependence that Ireland hath, and ought to have, upon England.¹¹

It is this controversy that underpins two Irish plays of the late 1690s – William Phillips' *St. Stephen's Green*, and George Farquhar's first play, *Love and a Bottle*. The relative merits and worth of the two societies is the theme underlying both plays, but the emphasis is different, in consideration of their different audiences. Farquhar's play was put on at Drury Lane at the beginning of December 1698, and published in London, and he is at pains to subvert the English audience's preconception of Irish character and society. *St. Stephen's Green* is targeted at an Irish audience and ridicules the Irish tendency to copy slavishly English fashions and ideas. But at the root of each play lies a Molyneuxesque assertion of the equal worth of English and Irish aristocratic society, and a demand for parity of esteem.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

St. Stephen's Green has a strong political base: the Irish setting and characters follow Molyneux's lead. In the teeth of a determined effort by the centralising English authorities to reduce Ireland from a kingdom to a colony, the play denies that Ireland is a lesser country or Dublin society inferior to London; it strives to validate this on the stage, and perhaps as importantly, as Gillespie points out, by publication.¹² The play is Molyneux's work transposed into another key - the key of culture rather than politics. Philips' play gives an implied critique of English society itself and an overt demolition of English attitudes to Ireland, in particular; it assails their arrogant assumption of Ireland's subservient colonial status, rather than accepting it as an equal nation and society. It further tries to raise the level of Irish consciousness by ridiculing those who look to England for their lead in fashion or morality, insisting on at least an equal footing for Ireland, and possibly a superior moral and ethical sense. It goes out of its way to berate those Irish who demean and ridicule their own country at home or abroad. The 'generous' union of equals it enacts between the English Freelove and the Irish Aemilia is the one it implies as the ideal political solution as well – neither party looking for material or economic dominance, but a union of noble minds that brings a train of material benefits as its own reward.

William Philips, like Farquhar, was a member of a prominent family from County Derry. He was intimately acquainted with the Irish aristocracy, and dedicated his first play, *The Revengeful Queen*, staged at Drury Lane in 1698, to the theatre-loving second Duke of Ormond, because 'your family have vouchsafed to be Patrons of mine for

¹² Raymond Gillespie, 'Political ideas and their social contexts', p. 118.

several Generations'. The play was a Heroic Tragedy set in Italy, and was not a success, partly because of a charge of plagiarism by Davenant, who had adapted the same story from Machiavelli.¹³

For his next effort, Philips changed course completely, and wrote *St. Stephen's Green*, a modern comedy set, presented, and published in Dublin - the first contemporary portrait of Irish Ascendancy society to reach the stage. He retained the close contact with the aristocracy, this time in the form of William O'Brien, third Earl of Inchiquin. William, the third Earl, was a Privy Councillor to Queen Anne and to George I. Philips, in his dedicatory epistle to *St. Stephen's Green* leaves no doubt about the Earl's attachment to the theatre, and his interest in dramatic fashions in spite of neo-puritan hostility,: 'This Play has a double Reason for seeking Shelter under Your Lordship; I writ it, and for our *Irish Stage*, and You are the chief Friend which either has.'¹⁴ He goes on to justify the theatre in general by invoking the Earl's approbation as a defence:

But I should be Cautious in Declaring what 'tis probable the World may Condemn in you; since the Humour of the present Age is, for a Man to own that he thinks Plays even lawful, 'tis almost enough to bring his Principles of Morality and Religion into Question. But, my Lord, the Firmness of yours is so well known, that I shall have no Reason to forbear saying, you have an Esteem for Plays; and I may, with Safety to your Reputation, Applaud you for it, since I am Confident the greatest Zealot wou'd slacken his Fury against the Stage, and join you in Supporting it, did he know how earnestly you Wish it Reform'd from the Corruption of Manners, to the Encouraging Virtue and Exposing Vice; and with what Decency, Modesty and Good Breeding, you wou'd have it Regulated.¹⁵

Philips is aligning himself here with the neo-Puritan backlash against theatrical permissiveness that had culminated in Jeremy Collier's pamphlet, *A Short View of the*

¹³ Introduction to William Philips, *St. Stephen's Green; or, The Generous Lovers*, ed. by Christopher Murray (Dublin: The Cadogan Press, 1979), p. 11.

¹⁴ William Philips, 'Epistle Dedicatory', in *St. Stephen's Green*, p. 57.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage, in the previous year, 1698. It now seems that Collier's publication was following fashion rather than setting it. In England, the rising middle-class was demanding a new style of drama, softer, more humane, more sentimental, that conformed to outside moral standards rather than to its own internal balancing system – a bourgeois rather than an aristocratic ethic. Ironically, this was the sort of ethic that Dublin had never abandoned; in fact, in the previous year, Joseph Ashbury, the director of Smock Alley, had been fined for swearing on stage.¹⁶ The intrinsic conservatism of the first Duke of Ormond and the Irish gentry had kept the Dublin theatrical fashions so far behind London that now they found themselves ahead of it again.

But the influence of the Earl of Inchiquin in this play goes beyond a generalised interest, Philips tells us:

You may remember you Caution'd me to observe these Things, when I first acquaint'd you that I had a Design to Write this Comedy and I have attempted to Obey you.¹⁷

The playwright and the patron have clearly had a discussion as to what this new Irish type of play was going to be, and have agreed a set of guidelines which will conform to the most exacting moral standards. This is to be a play set among Dublin's high society; there is to be no indecency and no immorality; Virtue will be encouraged and Vice exposed; the Corruption of Mannered Comedy will be excluded from the stage, and all

¹⁶ Stockwell, p. 40. She says this was possibly on foot of an order made by the Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Sunderland, on the 4th of June 1697 to combat the profaneness and immorality of the stage, and is the only apparent trace of interference by the Lord Chamberlain in the Irish Theatre.

¹⁷ Philips, 'Epistle Dedicatory', in *St. Stephen's Green*, p. 58.

will be done with Decency, Modesty and Good Breeding. This will satisfy the demands of Lord Inchiquin and the conservative Irish Ascendancy and put the Irish theatre on an equal footing with the latest trends in London. In fact, Philips goes much further, and within the play he contrasts the two societies, and finds that in all matters of morality and behaviour Irish society equals or surpasses the English. By invoking this contrast, he follows Molyneux's doctrine of a distinct but equal nation, and encourages the further development of playwrighting that is distinctly Irish. He finishes his 'Epistle Dedicatory' with a call for other writers to follow his lead in setting plays in Ireland and dealing with Irish situations and concerns, and gives all the credit for this new departure to Lord Inchiquin:

I shou'd be extremely pleased, if my Success wou'd move any other, who has a happier Genius, to divert this Town with some Performance of this kind. But it is my Satisfaction and my Pride, that tho' he should write better, he cannot meet with more Encouragement than I have done. And since I own my Weakness, and yet boast of Success, you may be assur'd, that as I think myself Answerable for the former, so I know the latter is owing to your Lordship.¹⁸

What both *Love and a Bottle* and *St. Stephen's Green* assert is the equality of the two societies. Farquhar does it in passing, but it is central to Philips' play. Kavanagh is of the opinion that *St. Stephen's Green* is just another late Restoration comedy which happens to be set in Dublin. 'It is only Irish in title', he writes, 'it is undistinguishable from any of the minor plays of the period, about London life.'¹⁹ This is an extraordinarily wrong-headed verdict. Dublin is central to the play. The mere fact of setting it in St. Stephen's Green subverts accepted standards: it is saying that Dublin has

¹⁸ Philips, 'Epistle Dedicatory', in *St. Stephen's Green*, p.58.

¹⁹ Peter Kavanagh, *The Irish Theatre: Being a history of the drama in Ireland from the earliest period up to the present day* (Tralee: The Kerryman Limited, 1946), p. 263.

places, characters and materials as good as there are in the squares and parks of London. All human life is walking around Stephen's Green; all we have to do is exploit it. 'In choosing the green as central to his play,' writes Christopher Murray, 'Philips found a symbol of the society for which he wrote.'²⁰

The view of Dublin expressed in the play is exactly observed, designed to evoke a recognition of the city and society, and a positive response to it. The method used is quite specific. Dublin aristocratic society is either directly invoked and described with approval, or else negative comments on it are expressed and then rejected. The impression given of the city is one of ease and gossip, of fresh air and high jinks around Stephen's Green. Several scenes are set in the Green, using a set design that would be instantly recognizable to the audience,²¹ and the impression is that it is the hub of Dublin society: everybody turns up there sometime, if they are not gallivanting on the Strand. 'Oh, 'tis such a Comfort! When my Husband is in a Dogged Humour, to call for my Glass Chariot, take the Air on the *Strand*, and make half a score pleasant Visits, and as many Conquests', Marina tells Aemilia.²² Bellmine introduces his English friend, Freelove, to the intimate size of Dublin by telling him:

I'll undertake you shall not be three days in town, but every Body in town will know you; nay, and know, whence you came, how long you stay, what's your Business, and if you have none, they will feign enough for you.²³

And Vainly assures the newcomers: 'I'll make you acquainted with the whole Town this Afternoon.'²⁴ This is only a difficulty for someone like Bellmine, who wants to 'be

²⁰ Introduction to *St. Stephen's Green*, p. 45.

²¹ Clark holds that these same sets were still in use at Smock Alley twenty years later in Shadwell's *The Sham Prince*, another play about imposing 'gentlemen'; *Early Irish Stage*, p. 148.

²² *St. Stephen's Green*, I. 1. 55.

²³ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 351.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II. 1. 117.

thought a very Lewd Fellow', and who thinks 'such a Character do[es] a Man effectual Service with Women',²⁵ but who needs a large population to do it with anonymity:

Women's inclinations are alike in all places, but all Places are not alike. In *London*, 'tis difficult to be known; here, impossible to be conceal'd. Such a Character may do one Service with the Woman, but not with her Relations. There you may make a thousand Cuckolds, yet they will never hear of your Name. Here, you cannot make one without being Intimate with him.²⁶

The attractiveness of strangers and visitors from London is acknowledged by Marina, but not approved, and it is the visitors who are satirized for their glib superiority and condescension; Marina, the local woman, refuses to be impressed by Bellmine's metropolitanism. Two strands of social criticism join here; the first is directed at London society: the general impression given in the following scene is that London is not a pleasant place, for all its frenetic activity and self-importance. That city is overtly evoked and rejected by this passage, as it is implicitly rejected throughout the play. London's case for being considered superior to Dublin is called into question. The other strand alludes to the qualities inculcated by the education of a gentleman. Travel and knowledge of the world, which Bellmine displays here, were giving way to the perceived primacy of morality or Virtue in the formation of the ruling class, and this is a quality which is markedly absent in Bellmine, for the present:

MARINA That supposition shews you are Strangers, or you wou'd know, that to be so, is a recommendation here.

BELLMINE Does that humour reign here? I hope it does in you too; then I may succeed; for I assure you I am but this moment arriv'd; and to make me still the more acceptable to thee, my Pretty Dear Creature; know, that I have brought over some New Fashions, New Tunes, and New Plays; I

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 321.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 345.

can tell you which house has the best Audience, which Player is most Applauded; who the Celebrated Beauty of the Town, who keeps the best Equipage; I can tell you who Loves who, and who does worse; what Duels have been lately Fought; who Kill'd, who Hang'd, who Jilted, who Married, who ----

MARINA And so Convince me, you go abroad for the same wise Intent, most of our Young Sparks do. But you may as soon Borrow Money of a grave Citizen, by this Character of your self, as expect any Favour from me by it.

BELLMINE Will this not please you? why then I can give you an account of the Court; I can tell you which Lord has the greatest Levy; I can tell you of great Favourites, who scarce cou'd Breathe for Crowds of servile Sycophants, and in a day's time as lonely as if it had been Writ over their Doors, "*This House is infected with the Plague*". I can tell you of the Advancement of Fools and Knaves, and the Disgrace of Men of Sense and Worth, I can ----

MARINA Hold, hold, you will only persuade me you have met with some Disappointment there, for few rail at the Court for any other Reason.

BELLMINE Let me have one Stroke at Rogues in Power ----

MARINA Not a Syllable, or I shall believe you are vexed, because you cannot be one in your turn.

BELLMINE Will not this do? why then have at the Parliament ---

MARINA Worse and worse.²⁷

In this scene, Bellmine has made his advances to Marina, metropolitan to provincial, typical of the Comedy of Manners, but has been comprehensively rebuffed.

The unsympathetic characters are villainous or ridiculous in direct proportion to their London fixation. The libidinous older gentleman, Sir Francis Feignyouth, enters in a rush and demands from the new arrivals in town: 'Well, and what price bear Wine and Women in London now? hah! does the *Mall* swarm with Masks, and is *French* Wine admitted yet?'²⁸ while the biggest idiot in the play, Vainly, is besotted with England and its fashions:

VAINLY I am glad we have Gentlemen come to us now that understand Breeding and Conversation; 'Tis not to be had here. I protest, Sir, I am forced to go to England once a year, to refine my understanding.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 225.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, II. 1. 256.

BELLMINE What need you put yourself to that Trouble? Cannot you keep a
Correspondence with your Tailor?
VAINLY: With my Tailor, Sir?
BELLMINE Yes; For all you learn by your Journey, is a new Fashion; and
all you understand is, whither your Clothes be well made.²⁹

Philips gives us an antidote to this provincial myopia when the two English stewards, Trickwell and Timothy meet. This time the point is made that the enlightened English do not take kindly to those Irish who belittle Ireland in order to ingratiate themselves with London society:

TIMOTHY Ease and Plenty have made this Alteration. Eating well and
Lying soft. Thank my Stars, I thrive very well in this Country.
TRICKWELL Then I suppose you Despise it.
TIMOTHY That's but an odd Reason.
TRICKWELL A very common one; for I have observ'd that none Despise
Ireland so much as those who thrive best in it. And none are so severe
in their Reflections upon it, as those who owe their Birth and Fortune
to it; I have known many of 'em, when they first come to *London*,
think there is no way so ready to purchase the Title of a Wit, as to
Ridicule their own Country.³⁰

This informed attitude to Ireland, by those who Englishmen who know it, contrasts tellingly with Farquhar's satirical tilt at the ignorant, credulous opinions of the English at large in their own country in *Love and a Bottle*:

LUCINDA Are you then one of the Wise Men of the East?
ROEBUCK No, Madam; but one of the Fools of the West.
LUCINDA. Pray what do you mean by that?
ROEBUCK. An Irish-man, Madam, at your Service.
LUCINDA Oh horrible! an Irish-man! a mere Wolf-Dog, I protest.

ROEBUCK Ben't surpriz'd Child; the Wolf-Dog is as well natur'd an
Animal as any of your Country Bull-Dogs; and a much more
fawning Creature, let me tell ye.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, III. 1. 235.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, IV. 1. 12.2.

[Lays hold on her.]

LUCINDA Pray, good *Cesar*, keep off your Paws; no scraping acquaintance, for Heaven's sake. Tell us some news of your Country; I have heard the strangest Stories, that the people wear Horns and Hoofs.

ROEBUCK Yes, faith, a great many wear Horns; but we had that among other laudable fashions, from London.....

LUCINDA Then you have Ladies among you?

ROEBUCK Yes, yes, we have Ladies, and Whores; Colleges and Playhouses; Churches, and Taverns; fine Houses, and Bawdy-Houses; in short, everything that you can boast of, but Fops, Poets, Toads and Adders.

LUCINDA But have you no Beaux's at all?

ROEBUCK Yes, they come over, like the Woodcocks, once a year.

LUCINDA And have your Ladies no Springes to catch 'em in?

ROEBUCK No, Madam; our own Country affords us much better Wildfowl. But they are generally stripp'd of their feathers by the Playhouse and Taverns; in both of which they pretend to be Criticks; and our ignorant Nation imagines a full Wig as infallible a token of a Wit as a Laurel.

LUCINDA Oh Lard! and here 'tis the certain sign of a Blockhead.³¹

Behind the farce, the duel of wit and banter, lies a truth about the naked ignorance and prejudice of English society, and the equality - or even superiority - of Irish society. Roebuck, while commenting ironically on his own country, is in fact comparing it favourably to the decadent foppish society of London, and sneering openly at the idea of the superiority of English fashions and ideas. His tirade actually describes Ireland as a place well able to combat and belittle any such imported ideas. England may show a powerful example, but Irish society, as Marina also displayed in the previous example, refuses to be gulled or impressed by those who would treat it with condescension.

All of these strands come together in the most remarkable passage in *St. Stephen's Green*, in Act 3, Scene 1, which sees the dismissal of English fashionable and moral authority in favour of an Irish independence of mind. By implication this declaration by

³¹ George Farquhar, *Love and a Bottle*, in *The Complete Works of George Farquhar*, ed. by Charles Stonehill (New York: Gordian Press, 1967), I. I. p. 14.

Sir Francis applies to *St. Stephen's Green* and plays in general, which are mostly imported from England while just as good could be available in Ireland. This fling at Irish provincialism is seen as a sort of interval or interjection by Kavanagh,³² while in fact it is one of the play's central themes. We do not need plays to be set in London, Philips is saying, we have all the material we need swanning around St. Stephen's Green:

VAINLY You are so obliging, Sir. Truly I think this Coat is very well
Cut, fits with a Good Air. I had it sent me by and Express from
London; for I cannot bear any thing but what comes from thence. Oh,
'tis a happy Place! and in a blessed Country, where there are all things
necessary, where there are such pleasures, and such Conveniences to
enjoy them!

FREELOVE I have been told you have all those here.

VAINLY Oh not one, Sir, not one.

FREELOVE You have good Wine?

VAINLY Yes, yes, that's true, I had forgot that.

FREELOVE Plenty of all sorts of Fish and Flesh.

VAINLY Phoo, they are perfect Drugs. Plenty of Meat and Drink; but
nothing else.

FREELOVE The people are Civil and Obliging.

VAINLY Especially to Strangers.

FREELOVE And Hospitable.

VAINLY To a Fault, Sir.

FREELOVE The Air is Good, a temperate Climate.

VAINLY Much the same as in *England*.

FREELOVE The Soil is Rich.

VAINLY Oh, 'tis too Rank.

FREELOVE What necessaries then, or what pleasures do you want? You
have fine Women.

VAINLY They are kind, I am sure.

FREELOVE To you chiefly, I suppose.

VAINLY Shall I make a Confession then among my Friends? I do not
believe ever any Man has been so successful. I do not know that ever I
ask'd in vain.

SIR FRANCIS I can hold no longer. Why dost thou little worthless
Contemptible Wretch! Do you entertain Strangers with your aversion
for your Country, without being able to give one Reason for it; and can
you give but one Reason for liking it, which if it were true, would
make all others abhor it? The Women fond of thee! Why the Common

³² Peter Kavanagh, *The Irish Theatre*, p. 263.

Hackneys who live by thee, Contemn thee. But such as he think if he is not affronted, he is belov'd.³³

All the significant attitudes are represented in this scene. Vainly's English obsession is exposed in its invincible stupidity by the returned Irishman, Bellmine, and he is quietly ridiculed about his attitudes to his own country by the enlightened Englishman, Freelove, until the most significant representative of the Irish Ascendancy in the play, Sir Francis, is forced to acknowledge how ridiculous such attitudes, of which he himself is not free either, really are.

'Claiming that Dublin is more or less like London does not help to establish a distinctive Anglo-Irish sense of identity,' according to Morash,³⁴ but Philips is not trying to. It is the *equality* of the two societies that he is asserting; he is using their resemblance to boost the idea of Ireland as an equal partner in the relationship between the two countries; he is not claiming Dublin society as unique and different, but as equal and similar; the idea of a distinctly Anglo-Irish identity would only emerge in the next twenty years in the face of a continual downgrading and belittling of the Anglo-Irish by English society and the English authorities. By the time Philips came to write his next play, in 1722, his outlook had hardened into a distinct sense of separate identity.

Another method which Philips uses to delineate and judge Dublin Ascendancy society in *St. Stephen's Green* is to have the unsympathetic characters express a negative opinion, which is then contradicted by a more sympathetic character, or else bolstered

³³ *St. Stephen's Green*, III. 1. 235.

³⁴ Morash, p. 41.

by another unsympathetic character, which doubly damns it. The two main offenders are the English, Lady Volant, who is posing as an aristocrat, and the silly fop Vainly.

- VAINLY Nay, I swear 'tis truth. Alas Madam, 'tis scarce a Compliment
 in this dull town.
- LADY VOLANT Do you think it so too, Vainly?
- VAINLY Oh Madam, I cannot bear it.
- LADY VOLANT Nay solemnly, Sir, it was a great while before I cou'd; it agreed
 as ill with my Constitution, as it doth with my Inclinations; but, thank
 my Stars, I have done tolerably well, since my being *Naturaliz'd*. How
 fortunate I am to have my Opinion strengthened by one of your
 Judgement! 'tis a horrid place, and I vow (as you say Mr Vainly) I do
 not see a pretty woman in it.
- VAINLY Not one but your Ladyship; nor is there an agreeable man here.
- LADY VOLANT Only Mr Vainly. The Women are so affected.
- VAINLY And the Men so Proud.
- LADY VOLANT So Censorious ---
- VAINLY And so selfish – and when a parcel of 'em are met together, so
 talkative.
- LADY VOLANT They make as much Noise as a Crowd of Apprentices around a
 Bonfire.³⁵

This is a piece of dialogue calculated to annoy a Dublin audience, or a Dublin reader. The Epistle Dedicatory makes it clear the play was written for 'our Irish stage',³⁶ and the published version was printed in Dublin for an Irish readership. The annoyance is compounded by having these criticisms articulated by a dubious English noblewoman and an affected Irish dandy who is a committed Anglophile. Vainly is the main carrier of the theme of the absurdity of elevating all things English and despising all things Irish. The problem with him is that his Anglophilia represents a sizeable chunk of Irish Ascendancy opinion. He may be a fool but he is still a Gentleman, and moves in all the best society in town. The attitude of society in Dublin to him is summed up by Bellmine:

³⁵ *St. Stephen's Green*, III. 1. 132.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

- BELLMINE Nay, it often happens that a Man is admired by some for that very Quality for which other despise him. And *Vainly* has one Qualification will make many Men, and most Women, value him.
- FREELOVE: And what is that?
- BELLMINE A Good Estate.
- FREELOVE Those who want one imagine it to be a much greater Blessing than it is found to be by you, or any who possess it.
- WORMWOOD For my Part, I cannot help fretting that such dull Rogues as that shou'd have one. 'Tis a gift of Fortune as much misapply'd as to confer swiftness on the Blind; for he can make no use of it; and that is all my Comfort. He squanders it all away in Sword, Perriwigs, Essence, Powder, and such material Things.³⁷

Here is sounded a main theme of the play: is *Vainly* a Gentleman? and if so what makes him one? What is a Gentleman, what does Society consider to be a Gentleman, and what, if any, are the discrepancies between the two? English plays of the latter half of the seventeenth century deal with this from an English perspective, but only Farquhar and Philips add to the mix the question, what constitutes an *Irish* gentleman? *St. Stephen's Green* provides evidence, as the above quotation indicates, that Irish and English society were of one mind on this subject. The dominant trope in the play is that one cannot be a gentleman in Ireland without an estate – landed gentry are the only gentry; only land produces income, and an estate bestows moral worth. *Vainly* is a gentleman by virtue of his land, regardless of good sense or behaviour, and though he is ridiculed, his social position is not called into question. Sir Francis is a libidinous old rogue, and Bellmine a licentious young one, yet society at large has no doubts of their nobility. It is Freeloove who upsets the apple-cart: he has all the appearance and manner of a gentleman, but has no estate. How can this be? And since he clearly is a gentleman, what makes him so?

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II. 1. 195.

This was a question that was much aired at the time. I have already demonstrated the contemptuous attitude of Gaelic Ireland to the new colonists. Even after the weaker spirits sold up and left, a lot of those remaining were landed but hardly gentry.³⁸ The dispossessed Irish were not alone in despising them: the English upper classes were perfectly aware of the way in which the Irish aristocracy had been diluted and corrupted. From this time, in parallel with the political diminution of Irish sovereignty, the English upper classes began to find their Irish equivalents lacking in the manners, poise and style of English gentlemen. *St. Stephen's Green* points out that the same dilution is happening in England: 'I can tell you of great Favourites, who scarce cou'd breathe for Crowds of servile Sycophants, and in a days time as lonely as if it had been Writ over their Doors, *'This House is infected with the Plague,'*³⁹ says Bellmine, who also wants to give 'one Stroke at Rogues in Power'.⁴⁰ While Philips defends the standards of the Irish Ascendancy, he also laments the mercenary and mannerless style of some of the rising gentry, in the form of Vainly. Marina harpoons him and his like in her remark on the means of acquiring an Estate: 'Tis as Difficult to be thought so here, without an Estate; as it is to be thought Honest and Get one.'⁴¹ This is one of the few overt flings in the play at the 'knaves and fools' who have risen to positions of prominence, even though one of the main concerns of *St. Stephen's Green* is defining the idea of a proper

³⁸ A good example is the case of Johnstown Castle in Wexford, originally the home of the Esmondes, a Norman family, which was confiscated by Cromwell and granted to one of his soldiers, a Colonel Overstreet, who found that a life on the land did not suit him. The estate was sold on several times before coming into the possession of John Grogan, a Wexford merchant and the son of a carpenter, in the late seventeenth century. By the time of the 1798 rebellion the Grogans had achieved such a degree of gentrification that the current landlord, Cornelius Grogan, was appointed Commissioner-General of the army of the Wexford Republic, which resulted in his execution. The estate was restored to the family in 1810, but they did not rise into the nobility until after 1900, when the heiress to the estate married the son of the Duke of Leinster. [Richard Roche, *Irish Times*, Sept. 13, 2003, page 15]

³⁹ *St. Stephen's Green*, I. 1. 87.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 94.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 44.

gentleman. The play prefers instead to take a positive approach and plots a blueprint for the behaviour of a society whose standing is threatened by the rise of knaves, fools, and those mannerless upstarts, such as Vainly or Mockmode in *Love and a Bottle*, whose idea of gentility extends no further than their clothes or their money – a caricature of the real thing. Philips recommends a code of action that regulates itself according to the spontaneous inner life and the finer feelings, a way of life that is noble and ‘generous’ rather than ‘calculating’ and ‘mercenary’. In this concern the play is for and about the ‘real’ gentry, and dismisses the aspirant new landlords and the ascendant bourgeoisie. There is no sign here of the rise of bourgeois interest in the theatre, but we can see the beginnings of the rise of Sentiment that was the preferred feeling of this new audience that was, so to speak, waiting in the foyer.

The reason for the opinion, which rings through this and other plays of the period, that only land is a reliable indicator of upper class status, is the ease of imposing on a society removed from the centre of fashion, yet relying too heavily on that centre for its ideas, fads and foibles. In *St. Stephen's Green*, Lady Volant is an imposter; but is accepted by Dublin society at face value because she comes from London, and has brazenly established herself. Vainly is captivated by her Englishness, and Sir Francis' provincialism betrays him into paying court to her, convinced that she must be rich because she comes from England and claims to be so. Yet it is quite plain to the two newly-arrived men-of-the-world, Bellmine and Freelove, that she is a fraud:

BELLMINE She has some Wit when she talks to Inferior People; but when in Conversation with those of Fashion and Sense, she endeavours to elevate her Thoughts, (as she calls it), and refine her Language, and

makes both unintelligible, so is affectedly Ridiculous. To be Witty she spoils her Language, and her Language confounds even what is Wit.⁴²

The key to gentility seems to be, then, elevated thoughts expressed in witty language. Language holds the key here, even more than clothes, air or person, or wit. You can recognise a gentleman or lady by the way they talk and by what they say. But that conclusion also carries dangers. Farquhar, in *The Beaux's Stratagem*, a play also much concerned with gentility, real and imagined, has one of the characters observe that she had 'known several footmen come down from London set up here for dancing masters, and carry off the best fortunes in the country'.⁴³ The outer accidentals of gentility can be learned by close acquaintance and study, so what differentiates a real gentleman or lady from a false one?

The answer given in *St. Stephen's Green* to the conundrum which Freelove poses is the quality of his mind – his 'generosity'. This is another weasel word that has shifted its meaning over the last three hundred years. In 1699 'generous' was understood as a translation of the French '*genereux*', meaning 'of noble birth' or 'behaving in a noble manner', and was the adjective from '*générosité*', which was a key concept in the work of the French dramatists, particularly Corneille, who dealt with the proper behaviour of aristocrats conforming to a lofty set of ethical and moral principles, regardless of the consequences to themselves. With Corneille, it is tied to another quality of '*vertu*', which was the natural judgement and correct ethical action of the 'generous' mind. The open-handedness that went with nobility has nowadays overtaken the primary meaning. The key to the question, and to Philips' play, lies in its sub-title, *The Generous Lovers*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, IV. 1. 119.

⁴³ George Farquhar, *The Beaux' Stratagem*, ed. by Michael Corder, New Mermaids Study Drama (London: Ernest Benn, 1976), III. 3. 113.

Freelove and Aemilia are 'generous', that is, noble in mind and spirit, even though they haven't got a shilling between them. This particular handicap, in everybody's opinion but their own, disqualifies them from the marriage stakes completely. Sir Francis regards it as positively indecent for an openly penniless suitor to be paying court to his niece – it flies in the face of the collective wisdom of upper-class society. His regard for Freelove waxes and wanes at the same rate as his knowledge of his fortune:

SIR FRANCIS What say you Sir, have you no Estate?
 FREELOVE Not an Acre, Sir.
 SIR FRANCIS Nor Money?
 FREELOVE Not a Penny.
 SIR FRANCIS (*Aside*) A strange dull Fellow this! (*To him*) And have you really now the Conscience to make Love to my Niece? Can you imagine she will throw herself away upon you in the Bloom of her Youth; one of her Wit and Beauty? But perhaps you think she has an Equal Stock of Money, and so hope to make your Fortune by her. But I can assure you, she is in the same Circumstances as you are, not worth a Penny.
 FREELOVE I knew it when first I saw her, yet my Love receiv'd not the least Check by that; I hope she will prove as Generous.
 SIR FRANCIS Generous do you call it? Death! you make me mad. What a pox is there no way to be thought Generous but by becoming Mad and Begging? And pray Sir, if I may ask you a Civil Question, if she were Generous enough, as you call it, and mad enough, as I call it, to Marry you, how wou'd you Maintain her, Sir?
 FREELOVE Oh, trust to our Stars for that.
 SIR FRANCIS I hope she will have more Grace. Trust to your stars for that! I wou'd as soon trust you for ten Thousand Pounds. (*Aside*) I have not heard a fellow talk so Sillily in all my life.....A Perfect Fool! Methinks too a very ugly ungentile Man, as ever I saw!⁴⁴

St. Stephen's Green keeps bringing up the idea of 'fortune': the absolute necessity of money for matrimony in upper-class society. This idea diametrically opposes 'generosity', that is, following the emotions, and acting instinctively without too much 'calculation'. The older generation think a man without a fortune has no business getting married at all unless he marries a woman with money, and vice-versa; or two fortunes

⁴⁴ *St. Stephen's Green*, III. 1. 373.

can marry. What they find really reprehensible and insane is two people in society without money marrying each other. In fact Sir Francis finds it morally opprobrious that Freelove has not even the decency to pursue his niece clandestinely. He not only tells Freelove he is insane to be courting Aemilia, he warns her about him as well, and in his presence:

SIR FRANCIS Look here, Niece, here is a Gentleman has given himself
the trouble to come hither to make Love to you, without having Money
enough to pay for a License, or the Wedding Dinner.
FREELOVE Madam, I own ---
SIR FRANCIS (*Interrupting*) Ay, ay, he owns it, what wou'd you have more; a
very honest undesigning Gentleman as ever I saw.
FREELOVE I have no hopes you shou'd ever have a favourable
thought for me, if it is to be purchas'd with Wealth. But if the sincerest
Passion, the humblest Adoration, a Heart immov'd by any thing but you,
can atone for the want of Wealth ---
SIR FRANCIS Satisfy yourself Sir, they will not. Nor your fine person,
nor your Wit, nor your Courage, nor your Stars, nor a thousand things
more.⁴⁵

Sir Francis' attitude is an echo of Old Bellair, in *The Man of Mode*, who is totally mercenary: he objects to the attitude of the young people, who should not be considered for marriage at all because they don't carry 'the blessing of a good estate',⁴⁶ and have 'got an ill habit of preferring beauty no matter where they find it'.⁴⁷

The burden of Philips' play is that Sir Francis, like Old Bellair, is wrong, and that Generosity is more important than Fortune. But at the end, Sir Francis has the pleasure of believing that he was right all along. On hearing that Freelove, far from being destitute, has an English estate of £3000 a year, he exclaims: 'Admirable! Excellent!

⁴⁵ *St. Stephen's Green*, III. 1. 109.

⁴⁶ George Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, ed. by John Barnard, New Mermaids edition (London: A&C Black, 1979) II. 1. 60.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, III. 1. 125.

Nay, I always thought he deserv'd one. A most compleat Gentleman!⁴⁸ He has all the other attributes of a gentleman, why not an estate as well, if the world is properly ordered?

The attitude of all the characters to Freelove and his ambitions is the same; we have to accept that the over-riding view of Irish, and English, society is being articulated. Aemilia discusses his merits with her cousin Marina, and highlights the split that separates their thinking. Aemilia displays a 'generous' soul, while Marina shows herself 'mercenary':

- MARINA Mere Rapture! But what Reputation has he in the World? For I regard that more than his Person or his Wit.
- AEMILIA As I, so he, was to most a Stranger. All agreed he had no Estate, but a fine Gentleman.
- MARINA How's that! No Estate, and a Fine Gentleman! Advise him to keep where he is, if he would preserve that Character. I assure you, 'tis as Difficult to be thought so here, without an Estate; as it is to be thought Honest and Get one.
- AEMILIA All are not of that Opinion; for if *Bellmine* had no Fortune, I suppose you'd think him a Fine Gentleman.
- MARINA I thank Heaven he has a very good one, and really Cousin, I find it much for his Interest in my Heart, that I never Considered him without One.
- AEMILIA You are mercenary.
- MARINA Not wholly so; perhaps I shou'd not esteem an acquaintance the worst; but I think a Good Estate is one of the prettiest Qualifications a Husband can have; my Love may decay, but an Estate is a certain Good.⁴⁹

'Mercenary' – acting for reward or wages, or behaving like a bourgeois merchant – is the opposite of 'generous', and it is of that Aemilia is accusing Marina. The two ideas are openly class-conscious, and both primary and secondary meanings are played with by Philips, even though no mercantile characters appear. And since money is an

⁴⁸ *St. Stephen's Green*, V. 2. 280.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 37.

absolute necessity for living in Society, Philips balances these two opposing attitudes by introducing a third idea as a compromise between them: he plots a middle course by invoking the quality of 'Sense', an attribute that is often mentioned in the play as an accepted yardstick for action and character. Too much calculation is bloodless, too little is foolish; but Sense will steer a course between the two.

Farquhar uses these two polar opposites to create two types of the Irish gentry in *Love and a Bottle*. Lovewell is sober and calculating, and Roebuck a spontaneous rakehell; Farquhar is expressing the same dualities, and asking the same questions: which of these attitudes is more genteel, and - which in the new dispensation comes to the same thing - which is superior morally? Farquhar plays with English preconceptions of the Anglo-Irish character: he gives them Roebuck as the wild untamed Irishman, of just the type that the English upper-classes were finding wanting in gentility, but he slips Lovewell past them almost unnoticed, sober, calculating, and just as Irish as Roebuck. Farquhar is equivocal as to which of these characters is morally superior: his solution is to have them exchange some of their characteristics, so that each will be the more complete for it. Philips, on the other hand, answers clearly. It is the 'generous' lovers who hold the high moral ground. The first act of *St. Stephen's Green* lacks a moral centre. Who, we ask ourselves, is the moral touchstone here? Where is the authoritative centre of the play? Not in the English Lady Volant, whose pretensions are dismissed long before she is exposed as a fraud; not in Sir Francis, who should be the natural figure of authority, but his behaviour is flawed; not Vainly who is silly, snobbish and easily led, nor Wormwood because he is so bitter and cynical he can be disregarded as a Cassandra. Bellmine could be a contender, as a returned local with worldly experience, but he has

been corrupted by his time in London. He is inclined to import English corruption, and lies and dissembles as easily as breathing: 'I were a hopeful fellow indeed, and had improv'd my time well in the World if I could not persuade my Mistress to any Opinion,' he boasts to Freeloove.⁵⁰ The moral authority eventually comes to rest in Freeloove and Aemilia, the 'generous' couple who are free from mercenary corruption; age has to learn from youth, and the 'generous' union of Irish woman and English man is morally and sentimentally superior, and ultimately economically advantageous to both. Their 'Generosity' enables them to accept each other, based on personal attraction and estimation of each other's spiritual worth, without any intrusion by the demands of Fortune. Freeloove says of Aemilia:

FREELOVE And is not she a Fortune without Money?
 WORMWOOD Ha! ha! ha! the Man's mad. Why, what the Devil is Fortune but Money, or What is Woman or Honour or any thing else without it.
 FREELOVE Has she not Virtue, Sense and Beauty?
 WORMWOOD The Woman is not ugly, that's the Truth on't. But where has thou been Educated? where hast thou spent thy time? who hast thou conversed with? Nothing but old Fables and Romances. [...] In this Age talk of Virtue and Sense!⁵¹

Wormwood misses the point that the temper of the age has changed and these 'old' Fables and Romances' are once again in fashion. The play is an action towards the recognition of the paramount value of Virtue and Sense, and their necessary reward by Fortune. With proper management, and a balance of Sense and Generosity, the lovers can have the best of both worlds, and the play becomes a moral drama for a virtuous society, a pattern for the best people to follow. Philips' play is unusual, for a comedy, in that he mixes in this instance the ideal with the real. The agreement between patron and

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, II. 1. 557.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, II. 1, 220.

playwright has been honoured. To modern eyes this arbitrary settlement of a fortune on the protagonists seems cheating, a clumsy grafting on to the trunk of the play, but Virtue must be rewarded and Vice exposed. Virtue can be seen to be rewarded through a long and happy life, but that is not possible within the conventions of the seventeenth century stage, so the best, if not the only way, to show this is to give the lovers the means towards a long and happy life, and have a convenient fortune fall into their laps. The two generous lovers, English man and Irish woman, are rewarded for their equal and unmercenary attraction and union; the desirability of a similar political arrangement is implied; the Dublin gentry of the late seventeenth century are shown to be, for the most part, 'Decent', 'Modest', and of 'Good Breeding', as Philips promised his patron in his 'Epistle Dedicatory', and Irish society, in spite of the tendency in some of its more feeble members to allow themselves to be dominated by England, is seen to be well able to stand on its own moral ground, and exercise its independent judgement.

Philips goes further by insinuating that Dublin's morality is superior to that of London. Frelove is an English rake who is instantly reformed by stepping on Irish soil and catching sight of Aemilia. Bellmine has been corrupted by his sojourn in London, but his attempts to spread that corruption in Dublin are rejected and thwarted by Marina, who goes on to engineer his reformation too. The other English characters, Lady Volant and Timothy, are exposed as imposters, and Vainly, who loves England and despises Ireland, is a complete fool. The only local character whose morality is ambiguous is Sir Francis Feignyouth, and he is saved ultimately because his innate gentility overrules his foolish, Anglophile behaviour.

Sir Francis is the most interesting of the Anglo-Irish characters. At one level he is a foolish, amorous old man in the *Commedia* tradition who must be chastened, but when he duly is, he breaks into a lamentation that would not have disgraced Synge – an early indication of the linguistic riches that Irish drama would come to offer:

What had I to do with a wife, what had I to do with a wife! Had I not Ease enough, had I not Freedom enough, had I not Wealth enough! I had everything but Wit enough – Oh, I am a Jest to the World, a Scandal to my Name, a Curse to my Family, and a Hell to my self.⁵²

At another level he shows signs of evolving into a Molyneuxesque state of political awareness, when he berates Vainly for ‘entertain[ing] Strangers with your aversion for your Country’.⁵³ This aspect of him remains largely undeveloped, as Philips steers him towards learning his lesson in how to behave with the dignity and gravitas called for by his age and position. Philips is careful not to pander to English society’s prejudices in any of his characters, and none of them display any characteristics that can be pointed to as overtly Irish, if we except Sir Francis’ outburst given above.

If everyone were decent and modest, however good their breeding, *St. Stephen’s Green* would be a dull play, and Dublin a dull town, as Lady Volant complained, but Philips gives us a cast of characters who have their own foibles and vices. Previous to Philips’ play we have had servants, soldiers and priests, but Philips shows us Irish high society for the first time. Murray and Kavanagh find his characters ‘humorous’ in the manner of Jonson, but only Wormwood, the jaundiced, bitter cynic, fits that bill. The others are blends of different character traits rather than dominated by one. Generally speaking,

⁵² *Ibid.*, V. 2. 169.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, III. 1. 273.

they are derivative rather than original: their prototypes on the Restoration stage are recognizable. Bellmine is a rake on the point of reformation, pretending to be virtuous in public, in order to get the opportunity of being vicious in private:

BELLMINE Freeloze, not a word more of my Extravagances, as you tender
my Pleasures; I am not so much Reform'd yet, but I have a Mind to
enjoy them a little further, and I cannot do that here, but under the
Disguise of a Sober, Discreet Person.
FREELOZE And so you'd be thought Virtuous, that you may be the more
Conveniently Wicked.⁵⁴

In this pretence at Virtue to gain the opportunity for lechery, Bellmine echoes Horner in *The Country Wife*, but in his readiness to reform, Philips aligns him with the hero of Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* (1696), in which the hero is a rake who, at the play's end, suddenly embraces Virtue and mends his ways. Cibber's drama is usually seen as the beginning of the end of Restoration lewdness on stage and the beginning of Sentimental Comedy, though Restoration comedy always had a moral base, in spite of the surface indelicacy. Philips' play comes three years later, and, not only has he a secondary hero who reforms in the last act, his main hero is already reformed from the beginning. One look at Aemilia just before the play starts and Freeloze is a changed man. Christopher Murray remarks that 'it can be said that by Philips' time the implicit moral theme of Restoration comedy had become explicit'.⁵⁵ Vainly is in the tradition of Sir Fopling Flutter, but with the Irish twist that he looks to London for his fads rather than Paris. He has the same thick skin and complete lack of self-awareness – his mind is stuffed with fashion and gossip. The two young ladies, Aemelia and Marina, are typically smart,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 310.

⁵⁵ Christopher Murray, intro. to *St. Stephen's Green*, p. 33, footnote 54.

independent, opinionated and lively heroines, who express the two sides of the question: one is 'generous', the other 'mercenary'.

Philips draws all these characters in fairly broad strokes, with little sense of local colour, taking care not to give comfort to the prejudices of those who disagreed with him. Farquhar, on the other hand, in a typically bravura move, takes those prejudices and builds dramatically on them.

In *Love and a Bottle*, he gives us, in Roebuck and Lovewell, two contrasted portraits of Irish gentlemen. Lovewell is hardly nationalised at all, but this is quite deliberate. It is one of the means by which Farquhar undermines his audience's preconceptions: Lovewell is sober, careful, modest, but he is also generous to Roebuck and a good friend in his hour of need: 'You know my Estate sufficient to maintain us both, if you will either restrain your Extravagances, or I retrench my Necessaries,' he tells him.⁵⁶ Roebuck is by far the more arresting figure of the two. He is the Irish type the English expect – penniless, wild, reckless, and lecherous – and Farquhar gives them exactly that, and then proceeds to modify the character and overturn those preconceptions. Roebuck is an Irish version of an Ascendancy rake – an Irish Horner. His name marks his aggressive masculinity, but his emblem in the play is not the buck but the Irish wolfhound: – 'a mere Wolf-Dog, I protest', says Lucinda.⁵⁷ His behaviour throughout is like that of a dog – galloping gleefully after a scent, but veering off when another supervenes. He is a big playful mutt; he might hurt you, but he means no harm: 'The Wolf-Dog is as well-natur'd an animal as any of your Country Bull-Dogs, and a much

⁵⁶ *Love and a Bottle*, I. p. 17.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I. p. 14.

more fawning creature, let me tell ye.’⁵⁸ His conduct, however outrageous, is an expression of his nature, and his behaviour towards women follows his own strange code of honour: he sees nothing wrong in seducing them, but thinks it heinous to tell about it: ‘The tongue is the only Member that can hurt a Lady’s Honour. [...] It must be private as Devotion – No blabbing.’⁵⁹ He is much addicted to his two vices that form the plays title - ‘Drinking and Whoring’,⁶⁰ as they are less elegantly referred to by Lovewell. But Roebuck is steadfast in what he sees as honourable action, and has the seeds of redemption in him; his ‘generosity’ is innate. Leanthe claims he is:

Wild as Winds, and unconfn’d as Air. – Yet I may reclaim him. His follies are weakly founded, upon the Principles of Honour, where the very Foundation helps to undermine the Structure.⁶¹

Farquhar is using the audience’s expectations against them; the vivid ‘Irishness’ of Roebuck blinds one to the subdued Irishness of Lovewell. It’s a classic conjuror’s trick; it only dawns gradually that the virtuous, sober one is as Irish as the wild one.

In the play, Lucinda is courted by three suitors, who are three very different aspects of The Gentleman. The third point of this triangle is Mockmode, who throws the other two, Roebuck and Lovewell, into relief. He is an English country esquire; in this character Farquhar has a satirical swipe at the university system. Learning ranked very low as a genteel accomplishment at the end of the seventeenth century; moral training, travel, worldly experience, and involvement in public affairs, were considered of much greater

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, II. 1. p. 24.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, II. 1. p. 22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, II. 1. p. 39.

importance.⁶² Nor was attendance at University any guarantee that anything was learned there. Mockmode has a country estate and a University education, but that doesn't make him much of a gentleman. We can see here a difference between the attitudes of the two countries: In Philips' play, Vainly is accepted by Dublin society because he has the primary requirement – a substantial estate. In England, Farquhar finds, something more is needed. Mockmode rolls into town like a country bumpkin – 'He's newly come to Town from the University, where his Education could reach no farther than to guzzle fat Ale, smoke Tobacco and chop Logick'⁶³ – while Roebuck and Lovewell slide easily into society, high or low. The grafting on of the attributes of Fencing, Dancing, and playing the Flute do not improve Mockmode. His mistake is in wanting to be a Beau, in taking the caricature of a gentleman for the real thing. In a Beau, the obvious externals are exaggerated, the inner essence is ignored or absent. Farquhar slyly makes the point that the Irish Roebuck – penniless, dishevelled, disowned by his father, and with no education but 'the world' – is more of a gentleman than an English estate owner with a University education: 'His Mien and Air shew him a Gentleman,' says Lucinda.⁶⁴ He is gentry in demeanour, behaviour and excess – a Restoration gentleman, before neopuritanism began to equate nobility with virtue, and create a new type of Sentimental gentleman of whom Lovewell is already an example.

The question being asked by Farquhar is, which of these is the right, or acceptable model of a gentleman? His answer seems to be, none of them. Mockmode has the estate, Lovewell has the sobriety, and Roebuck has the "Mien and Air". All are incomplete, yet each is convinced that his is the right model. Squire Mockmode, as his name tells us,

⁶² George C. Brauer: *The Education of a gentleman: Theories of Gentlemanly Education in England, 1660-1775* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1959).

⁶³ *Love and a Bottle*, I. 1. p. 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 14.

thinks that by aping the activities and manners of the extravagant Beaux, he will rise from the lowest class of gentleman into the nobility; to him, as to Vainly in *St. Stephen's Green*, only an Estate and outer image count for anything. Appearance is all:

MOCKMODE Must I then lose my title of 'Squire, 'Squire *Mockmode*?
 RIGADOON 'Squire and Fool are the same thing here.
 [...]
 MOCKMODE Well, since I can't be a 'Squire I'll do as well. I have a great Estate, and want only to be a great Beau, to qualify me either for a Knight or a Lord. By the Universe, I have a great mind to bind myself 'Prentice to a Beau. – Could I but dance well, play upon the Flute, and swear the most modish Oaths, I would set up for Quality with e're a young Nobleman of 'em all. ⁶⁵

Roebuck and Lovewell care not a whit for appearance, and an estate, while convenient, is only the means of their maintenance. Lovewell doesn't hesitate to share the fruits of his estate with Roebuck, yet he disagrees diametrically with him as to the correct behaviour of a gentleman:

LOVEWELL Yes, you are my friend. All my thoughts were employ'd about you. In short, I have one request to make. That you would renounce your loose wild Courses, and lead a sober life, as I do
 ROEBUCK That I will, if you'll grant me a Boon.
 LOVEWELL You shall have it, be't what it will.
 ROEBUCK That you wou'd relinquish your precise sober behaviour, and live like a Gentleman as I do.
 LOVEWELL That I can't grant.
 ROEBUCK Then we're off. ⁶⁶

Farquhar is at pains in Act 1 to establish Roebuck in the minds of his audience as a wild Irishman, penniless, lecherous and pugnacious, and then proceeds during the course of the play to undermine and question this perception, by showing his underlying code of honour and inherent genteel qualities. He allows Roebuck's Irishness to fade into the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, II. 2. p. 25.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II. 1. p. 24.

background while he concentrates on his 'wildness'⁶⁷, a trait that identifies him with the other rakish heroes and heroines of Restoration comedy. Lovewell's Irishness is invisible at first under his sober demeanour; his openly acknowledged nationality at the play's end comes as something of a shock. Farquhar shows us that neither the sober gent nor the wild buck is the perfection of gentility, merely the external appearance. Roebuck is too wild, Lovewell too sober. During the course of the play, they exchange characteristics, as Farquhar has prefigured in the piece of dialogue quoted above. Roebuck gains some gravitas, and Lovewell becomes reckless under the stimulus of love. Both of the Irish gentlemen are tamed by the power of a woman: Lovewell is loosened by his passion for Lucinda, Roebuck is calmed and seduced by Leathe's constancy. Neither takes anything from Mockmode, (except his money for Roebuck's paramour). They have no interest in him or in what he wants to become. The Englishman's idea of gentility, Farquhar is saying, is far too concerned with the outer shell; in the Irishmen, gentility is inherent, it is not to be learned. It can be recognized, but not taught. Its true nature does not lie in fashionable accomplishment, or the latest clothes, but in the superior qualities of the 'generous' mind. A commoner disguised as a gentleman will always be exposed, and a gentleman, or lady, disguised as a commoner will shine through the disguise. Cherry in *The Beaux's Stratagem* tells Archer: 'Your discourse and your habit are contradictions, and it would be nonsense in me to believe you a footman any longer,'⁶⁸ and Roebuck's dishevelment at the start of *Love and A Bottle* does not conceal the mien and air of an aristocrat.

⁶⁷ A characteristic described also by Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, I. 1. 100 & 129.

⁶⁸ *The Beaux' Stratagem*, II. 2. 185.

The lesson of the play is that Mockmode, for all his new accomplishments, remains a 'Squire; being born in that stratum of society at the lower edge of what may be considered a gentleman, he cannot escape it:

MOCKMODE	Mr. Lyrick, is this your Poetical Friendship?
LYRICK	I had only a mind to convince you of your 'Squireship.

This is far more an Irish than an English view. English high society at that period was starting to open up to the bourgeoisie, but only to those with money and manners enough to make the transition, and Mockmode has a long way to go. In Ireland, as Philips has shown us, there is no sign of that social change as yet. In his later plays, Farquhar does observe this rising phenomenon. By the time he came to write *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707), he is firmly of the view that this English society is one that respects wealth more than virtue. Philips had remarked in *St. Stephen's Green* on the unlikelihood of being honest and acquiring an estate; Aimwell and Archer, in *The Beaux' Stratagem*, coolly observe London society, where the noble Jack Generous is shunned for his poverty, while Jack Handicraft – 'a handsome, well-dressed, mannerly sharping rogue' ⁶⁹ - and Nick Marrowbone – 'a professed pickpocket and a good bowler' ⁷⁰ - move in the best company in town because of the status awarded by their ill-gotten gains. Our two heroes have had to leave town before their poverty turned them from eligible bachelors into pariahs. At the start of the play, the two are indignant at this injustice: 'We are men of intrinsic value, who can strike our fortunes out of ourselves, whose worth is independent of accidents in life, or revolutions in government.'⁷¹ But at

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 132.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 137.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 156.

the end they have changed their tune; Aimwell says of his accidental good fortune: 'Thanks to the pregnant stars that framed this accident.'⁷² They have come to acknowledge that this is a world and a society in which a man's value owes a lot more to his extrinsic than to his intrinsic qualities, as the case of Jack Generous has already shown, 'There is no scandal like rags, nor any crime so shameful as poverty.'⁷³

This rising and falling in fortune and society is obviously one which is of great interest to Farquhar. It was a matter which touched intimately on his own life, being born a gentleman into a large poor family. Chetwood says of him:

He was born in the North of Ireland, of Parents that held no mean Rank in that part of the Country, who having a numerous Issue, could bestow on him no other Fortune than a genteel Education, which he completed in the University of Dublin, where he acquired a considerable Reputation.⁷⁴

At Trinity College he won an Exhibition of four pounds a year to help pay his way, but lost it for a period, as a result of a brawl at Donnybrook Fair in which a man was killed. According to Donald Bruce, a critic who favours the Genteel Restoration comedies and is hostile to Farquhar, his wretched experience as a sizar – a student who was also a servant – at Trinity College made him socially unsure and assertive, but this is contradicted by Chetwood and by his consistent popularity among his peers in the military and social circles in which he moved in later life.⁷⁵ His already precarious existence was exacerbated when he left Trinity and joined Smock Alley as an actor. His success as a playwright in London produced no great income, and in a misunderstanding

⁷² *Ibid.*, V. 4. 106.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 128.

⁷⁴ W R Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage* (Dublin: [n. pub.], 1750), p. 129.

⁷⁵ Donald Bruce, *Topics of Restoration Comedy* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1974), p. 56.

worthy of one of his plays, he married a woman under the mistaken impression she was an heiress, while she thought he was rich. But through it all he retained his genteel pride, and when he fell on hard times, he withdrew from society rather than embarrass his friends. But his later plays critique genteel society and acknowledge the rise of middle-class dominance in society and the theatre.

Farquhar uses *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux' Stratagem* both to depict bourgeois society and look sideways at genteel society. Philips, in *St. Stephen's Green*, proves the superiority of the 'generous' over the 'mercenary'; Farquhar acknowledges the triumph of the 'mercenary' over the 'generous'. In the later plays, *The Recruiting Office* and *The Beaux' Stratagem*, he shows that genteel society is thoroughly mercenary, and that it considers a person's financial worth to be equal to his worth morally. His heroes and heroines have to learn to act against this set conviction, and learn to behave 'generously'. They are then rewarded materially for their superior moral worth. In doing so he is acknowledging a tendency in late seventeenth century comedy to see economics as the primary reality, itself an offshoot of the development of empiricism. When we look at human activity and motivation, the basic reality is economic; politics, law, philosophy, religion, the arts, patriotism, and all the finer feelings follow in the wake of economic survival. This reality was obscured while the drama only dealt with the rich and powerful; then honour and heroism could thrive. But once the drama moved to consider the lives of ordinary people, the primacy of economics became glaringly obvious. The jostling on the social ladder is a ruthless business; the rise or fall can be sudden or brutal, like that of Jack Generous in *The Beaux Stratagem*, or the fallen favourites to whom Bellmine refers in *St. Stephen's*

Green. Since one cannot live without money in the upper reaches of society, Farquhar asks how far is one prepared to go to get it, in order to preserve or elevate one's social standing. His answer is to invoke repeatedly a parallel between the Beaux and the Highwaymen. Money changes everything, as Justice Balance points out in *The Recruiting Officer*. When Silvia had a dowry of fifteen hundred pounds, Captain Plume would do 'well enough for a bare son-in-law', ⁷⁶ but when she becomes heir to an estate of twelve hundred pounds a year, she must forget Plume, because: 'This fortune gives you a fair claim to quality and a title.'⁷⁷ She is now a commodity and a valuable one.

In this matter Farquhar shows us the lower gentry and the upper middle-classes aping the actions and attitudes of those above them, and makes his disapproval quite clear. He is criticising the mercenary outlook of the upper classes, which is being adopted by those below them. In *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux' Stratagem* it is the characters who reject the mercenary and embrace the generous who are rewarded. In *The Recruiting Officer* Plume scorns to pursue Silvia when she is rich, preferring 'the generous, good-natured Silvia in her smock'; ⁷⁸ she, in turn, refuses to exploit her fortune to raise her social standing, and pursues and wins Plume. Aimwell in *The Beaux' Stratagem*, out of love and decency, acts decisively against his own economic interests by confessing to Dorinda, and she finds this an expression of his innate gentility, he is 'generous' and has a 'gentleman's honour', ⁷⁹ and she accepts him anyway.

⁷⁶*The Recruiting Officer*, II. 2. 21.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, II. 2. 15.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, V. 3. 21.

⁷⁹*The Beaux' Stratagem*, V. 4. 89..

Farquhar's work is revolutionary in shifting the epicentre of drama towards the middle-classes without losing the sparkle and lightness that was associated with genteel comedy; but this 'lowering' of the tone of comedy has led to Farquhar suffering from some risibly snobbish criticism. Horace Walpole, in particular, takes a lofty tone to Farquhar:

Etherege, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Cibber wrote genteel comedy, because they lived in the best company. Farquhar's plays talk the language of a marching regiment in country quarters. Presumably a comparable reflection of the most typical area of their author's social experience.⁸⁰

Note that 'genteel', which indicates upper-class comedy. Farquhar did not write genteel comedy of that sort, apart perhaps from *Love and a Bottle*; what he did was broaden the range of 'genteel' comedy to include the rising middle-class as equal partners in the plays, sharing the limelight with their upper-class betters. This enables him to use his comedy to evaluate genteel society, and genteel comedy itself. *The Beaux's Stratagem* keeps asking the audience what, in their opinion, within a rapidly changing society, constitutes true gentility. Characters are always ready to assert their right to be considered gentlefolk. Cherry sees herself as entitled to marry 'nothing under a gentleman'.⁸¹ Scrub is a servant but swears without irony, 'upon my honour, as I'm a gentleman'.⁸² Gibbet the highwayman considers that style is of the utmost importance in the conduct of a robbery: 'There's a great deal of address and good manners in robbing a lady; I am the most a gentleman that way that ever travelled the road.'⁸³ Boniface, the

⁸⁰ Michael Cordner, intro. to *The Beaux' Stratagem*, p. xix.

⁸¹ *Beaux' Stratagem*, II. 2. 8..

⁸² *Ibid.*, III. 3. 5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, IV. 2. 137.

landlord of the inn, who sees all sorts, thinks that Aimwell 'is so much a gentleman every manner of way, that he must be a highwayman'.⁸⁴ The continuous linking of the Beaux and the Highwaymen is quite deliberate: both are out to relieve some lady of her wealth. Alan Roper points out: 'Aimwell and Archer are also gentlemen who travel the roads of England in search of a lady's fortune.'⁸⁵

Farquhar's later plays can be seen as a sort of pendant to Philips' inquisition of the relative moral worth of English and Irish high society. Philips implied that English high society was corrupted by the pursuit of materialism and position, and Farquhar demonstrates its shameless pursuit of worldly gain, its fervid embrace of economics as the prime motivator of all its activities, its trampling on those who did not have money enough to satisfy its demands, and its dismissal of those who did not belong to it. He charts the ways in which the lives of the few were ordered by rules different those which governed the many. Scrub, for example, lives in fear of being pressed into the army, while Count Bellair lives a life of ease as a prisoner-of-war.

In *The Beaux' Stratagem*, Farquhar exploits the tradition of genteel comedy by questioning and undermining its audience's automatic assumptions about what constitutes true gentility, as he did in *Love and a Bottle*. In the earlier play Farquhar also undermined the audience's casual evaluation of the Irish gentry and nation. At the end of that play, he brings the audience full circle; he has not alluded to the nationality of Roebuck since the first act, and not at all to Lovewell's, but at the end, he reminds the audience that our heroes are Irish gentlemen, when Lucinda orders Lovewell to make over his Irish estate to his sister and Roebuck. He then drives the lesson home by using

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, II. 2. 58.

⁸⁵ Michael Corder, intro to *Beaux' Stratagem*, p. xxiv.

an Irish entertainment to finish the comedy: '*An Irish Entertainment of three Men and three Women, dress'd after the Fingallion fashion.*'⁸⁶ The Irish gentlemen have shown themselves possessed of the 'generous' virtues: Lovewell's jealousy has broken open his sober carapace and allowed him to trust Lucinda; Roebuck adopts virtue as the proper course. He is not to be bought even for a good cause; his boast is that he:

always slighted Gold;
But most when offer'd as a sordid Bribe.
I scorn to be brib'd even to Virtue;
but for bright Virtue's sake, I here embrace it.⁸⁷

The dramatic action that Roebuck embodies is the growth from Restoration rake to Sentimental gentleman; he has added Virtue to the list of his accomplishments, subdued his wildness, and gained an estate. From being the exemplar of a 'wild' Restoration character, he has grown into an upright example of the Anglo-Irish gentleman of the eighteenth century.

⁸⁶ *Love and a Bottle*, V. 3. 72.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, V. 3. p. 73.

Chapter IV

“The Reigning Follies of this Spacious Town”:

Charles Shadwell's Irish Comedies

The bourgeois audience; Charles Shadwell and the rise of the 'Bourgeois Ascendancy'; Shadwell's plays: *The Hasty Wedding*, *The Sham Prince*, *Irish Hospitality*.

Around the turn of the eighteenth century, Smock Alley was still very much under the influence of Dublin Castle and the Viceregal court, but after 1700 the hold of the Castle and the nobility on the theatre weakened, as the grip of the newly risen “bourgeois gentry” took hold. A large part of the wealth that stayed in the country was finding its way to Dublin, where the landed gentry spent the rents from their estates, the executive and its officials spent their incomes, the military spent their pay, and the merchant class fattened on them all.¹ This society and audience was, as Stockwell observed ‘a psychological unit. [...] Its country was England, its civilization was English, and it looked towards London as Mohammedans look to Mecca.’² But it was not so unified as she suggests: the seeds of disaffection could be seen already sprouting in Molyneux’s *Case of Ireland...Stated*. All Catholics were barred from office or advancement as a matter of course, but even the Castle Protestants were barred from the highest offices. The English executive did not trust any Irishman to run the country in the way that maximised English advantage.³

Dublin Castle had, by the first decade of the eighteenth century, fallen into disrepair, and the social hub had shifted to Trinity College, the Dublin Philosophical Society, and the theatre at Smock Alley, which had become, in Clark’s phrase, ‘the indoor equivalent of St. Stephen’s Green’.⁴ The patronage of the nobility was still crucially important to the theatre: the second Duke of Ormond, when he returned to Ireland in 1697 as the leading peer of the country, became the chief patron of the Smock Alley Theatre and

¹ L.M Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1972), p. 46. Cullen calculates that the outflow of absentee rents was not as great as is commonly supposed, but accounted for between one-sixth and one quarter of the total rent-rolls of the country. In 1698, this amounted to £100,000, and in 1720 had risen to £300,000.

² Stockwell, p. 174

³ Stockwell, p. 177.

⁴ Clark, *Early Irish Stage*, p. 145.

brought the company to perform in Kilkenny during the off-season.⁵ When Ormond became Lord Lieutenant in 1703, he was given a lavish civic reception for his arrival in Dublin, at which the poem of welcome was delivered by Richard Estcourt, one of the actors from Smock Alley, and in the following year, Ormond's attendance at Farquhar's benefit contributed to a crowded house, from which Farquhar derived £100 profit, twice the usual amount. Farquhar had been persuaded to undertake the part of Sir Harry Wildair in his own play *The Constant Couple*, but Chetwood tells us: 'he executed the part so lamely, as an actor, that his Friends were ashamed for him'.⁶

About 1715, Charles Shadwell praised the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Bolton, because 'plays and players are by him approved',⁷ and he was 'the great supporter of the Stage'.⁸ In 1754, Peg Woffington spoke a Prologue dedicated to another Lord and Lady Lieutenant, the Duke and Duchess of Dorset, :

Thy smile
Has oft encouraged and adorned my toil;
From thence my first, my fairest hopes I drew,
Nor feared success, when patronized by you.⁹

The Lord Lieutenant's semi-royal persona was acknowledged in the splendour of his box at the theatre. On grand occasions, the viceroy was received in the vestibule by the patentee of the theatre, dressed in regulation court attire and bearing lights in two silver

⁵ Clark, p. 109.

⁶ Chetwood, p. 130.

⁷ Prologue to *Irish Hospitality; or, Virtue Rewarded*, in Charles Shadwell, *Works of Charles Shadwell*, 2 vols. (Dublin: printed for GEORGE RISK and JOSEPH LEATHLEY in Dame's-Street and PATRICK DUGAN on Cork-Hill, Booksellers, 1720), II, p. 202 [The two volumes are published in one cover, but with separate pagination. There is a mistake in the pagination of the second volume in the 1720 edition in the National Library of Ireland, where the numbers of the pages skip suddenly from page 104 to page 141, but I have followed the pagination used in that text.]

⁸ 'Epilogue to be Spoken in Mourning the last time the Duchess of Bolton comes to the Playhouse before she leaves Ireland', in Shadwell, *Works of Shadwell*, II, p. 341.

⁹ Stockwell, p. 181.

candlesticks.¹⁰ In 1745, when Lord Chesterfield was Lord Deputy, he was met by Thomas Sheridan, the manager of the theatre, and David Garrick, who was appearing on his second visit to Dublin, and led to his box with two lighted candles. 'It is related', writes Constantia Maxwell, 'that [...] he spoke kindly to Sheridan, but did not even return Garrick's salute.'¹¹ Thomas Sheridan, to Chesterfield, was an important man in Dublin society, but Garrick was just an actor.

The subsidising of certain plays or certain nights at the theatre became an important part of the revenues of whichever theatre was holding the title 'Royal' at the time. Hitchcock tells us that such affairs were known as 'government plays', and that the Theatre Royal received 'a certain sum annually from the government for performing of plays on particular nights, such as the King and Queen's birth-day, his Majesty's accession, &c.'¹² On those nights, in order to promote the most fashionable audience, the ladies were admitted free to the boxes, a device which, however, attracted the low with the high. In Shadwell's *The Hasty Wedding* a lady of the *demi-monde* tells us that: 'My Lord talked a great deal to me in the Lettice last Play night, I know he likes my colour, and he praised my hand and neck'.¹³ In *The Sham Prince*, also by Shadwell, Lady Homebred, who is a thrifty manager, tells us that Government Nights are among the free entertainments that she and her daughters frequent:

I give 'em diversions enough, for when the Government invites, they always see the play; and when the Corporations ride the Fringes, I carry 'em to a relation's of mine in Castle Street, where they take their bellies full of the show. Nay once, I went with 'em to a Lord Mayor's Feast.¹⁴

¹⁰ Stockwell, p. 183.

¹¹ Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges*, (London: Harrap, 1936; repr. Portrane Co. Dublin: Lambay Books, 1997), p 232.

¹² Stockwell, p. 183.

¹³ *The Hasty Wedding*, IV. in *Works of Shadwell*, p. 61.

¹⁴ *The Sham Prince* I. in *Works of Shadwell*, p. 174.

Government Nights were agreed to be the most glittering occasions in the theatrical calendar. In 1722, the grant assigned to the playhouse was £56, and appropriated, curiously, under "Account of Secret Service Money," perhaps indicating a perception of the theatre as an instrument of clandestine government policy. By 1776 Spranger Barry at Crow Street was given £120, 'payable by government for four plays within the year'.¹⁵ By 1800 it had grown to 'one hundred and fifty pounds sterling [...] payable by Government for the five Government Plays to be performed in each and every year'.¹⁶ Smock Alley was receiving a Government subsidy almost two hundred years before the Abbey Theatre was established.

The "nobility and gentry" financed the building of the theatres. We have already seen how they funded and held the shares in Smock Alley, and when the new theatre was opened in Crow Street in 1758, the finance was raised by subscription 'by many noblemen and persons of quality'.¹⁷ They also took a part in deciding the repertoire of plays produced: *The Dublin Evening Post*, in 1740, reports that:

A great number of the Nobility and Gentry [...] have subscribed for six plays to be acted in the theatre in Smock Alley, the first of which is to be *The Provoked Wife* and will be performed on Thursday next.¹⁸

"Waiting on the gentry" became an established custom, whereby the leading actors, actresses and managers visited the ladies and gentlemen of the town in order to advertise or sell tickets for their performances. Such patronage and the coteries that grew from it became particularly acrimonious with the establishment of other theatres in competition with Smock Alley. The ladies were inclined to become partisans of one of them, and

¹⁵ Stockwell, p. 184

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

exercise their influence on behalf of their favourites. But even before 1720 the ladies are constantly appealed to in the prologues and epilogues of Shadwell to use their charms on behalf of the playwright and the theatre:

*Unless bright nymphs, who in the Circle sit,
Command some mercy from th'adoring Pit;
[...]
To you bright charmers of the blooming age,
[...]
To you we humbly sue and thus complain:
Be you our friends, the Pit we're sure to gain.*¹⁹

The influence and importance of the society ladies is further indicated by Shadwell's dedicating his *Collected Works* to Lady Newton, to express his gratitude for her support:

The success I have met with was in great part owing to Your Ladyship. The countenance you have shown and the persons of Quality you have brought with you are convincing demonstrations how much the spirit of gaiety of *Dublin* centre in Your Ladyship.²⁰

Favourite actors were much cherished; the Duke of Ormond, prior to his departure from Dublin in 1705, 'appealed to the Lords Justices and the nobility of the Irish Kingdom to undertake a subscription for the support of the Smock Alley Players'.²¹ The military command contributed too. About 1708, Hitchcock tells us, 'Mr. Thurmond did for his better Encouragement to continue in the Kingdom receive a Day's Pay from each officer of Coll. Munden's and another Regiment then in Dublin'.²² But Thurmond, who some years earlier had collected a subscription from the ladies of Dublin when the theatre was closed for two months by the king's death and kept it all for himself, absconded. This, and other drains from his acting pool, led the theatre manager, Richard Ashbury, to turn

¹⁹ Epilogue 2 to Shadwell's *Rotherick O'Connor*, in *Works of Shadwell*, p. 270.

²⁰ Dedication to *Works of Shadwell*, p. VI.

²¹ Stockwell, p. 121.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 186.

the theatre into a company in which the players were shareholders, sharing in the profits, but in return they were bound by a contract not to bolt to London, but 'did mutually enter into articles and Bonds to continue in the Kingdom for the Diversion of the Nobility and Gentry'.²³ Five years later, Thurmond returned, armed with a letter from Ormond, now exiled, and demanded to become one of the shareholders. Ashbury refused and appealed to Ormond, saying he would reinstate Thurmond at a salary of sixty pounds a year instead. Ormond favoured Ashbury's argument, and Thurmond accepted his verdict.²⁴ The hold the Butlers had over the country and the stage was still strong in spite of the Duke's absence.

As the century advanced, the highest offices in Ireland, rather than being a reward for the merits and talents of the local population, became, as has been pointed out, a dumping-ground where English politicians in difficulties could recoup their fortunes, a sinecure for partisans, or a place of exile for out-of-favour statesmen.²⁵ Few, if any, of the Lords Lieutenant were committed to the welfare of the country; many actively opposed it.²⁶ The theatre became a forum where dissatisfaction with the current regime could be aired, on the stage and in the auditorium, as English policy concentrated on blocking the flow of Irish commerce and the diminution of self-regulation in Irish affairs.

The mercantile and landed middle-classes rose to positions of power during the eighteenth century, and also expanded to fill the social roles previously occupied by the nobility. Sackville St., extending now from Rutland Square to the new Carlisle Bridge,

²³ Clark, p. 126.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁵ Stephen Gwynn, cited by Stockwell, p. 177.

²⁶ Swift, *Drapier Letter*, IV: 'I have known upon occasion some of these absent officers as keen against the interest of Ireland as if they had never been indebted to her for a single groat.' in *Portable Swift*, p. 189.

was reputed to be the broadest and finest in Europe,²⁷ and was lined with the houses of rich merchants. As the city and country grew more prosperous over the century, in spite of trade restrictions and the outflow of wealth to absentee landlords, the increasing wealth and confidence of the middle-class led them to assume the pursuits of the gentry. Political developments had infiltrated and changed the character of the theatre, making it, with the rise of bourgeois Protestant Ireland, a sounding board for the concerns and divisions of that class, which, as in France and America, was taking most of the positions of power.

In Ireland, the comedies of Charles Shadwell provide us with a tableau of the early stage of this bourgeois ascension to the summit of Irish society.

²⁷ Constantia Maxwell, p. 58.

Charles Shadwell and the Rise of the “Bourgeois Ascendancy”:

Farquhar had alluded, in his plays, to the triumph of the ‘mercenary’ over the ‘generous’, and it is the triumphant mercenary society of Dublin that is the milieu of Charles Shadwell’s Irish comedies, a mercantile class that has risen to near aristocratic status. The “nobility and gentry” is a frequently used mantra in the theatrical documents of the early *eighteenth century*, but while the phrase remained intact, the thing signified underwent radical change. Charles Shadwell shows us the extent of the changes, both current and already completed.

In the plays of the late seventeenth century the merchant classes tend to be treated with contempt, but towards the end of the century there is a shift in attitude. The success of Farquhar and others moved the centre of gravity of the theatre away from the Aristocracy and towards the rising middle-classes, and in the second decade of the eighteenth century, Dublin had, in Charles Shadwell, its own resident playwright to articulate the concerns of that middle-class and interrogate the claims of the upper class on its behalf. Shadwell was writing for and about a new audience, a *haut-bourgeois* audience that had risen with astonishing speed: a new Commonwealth flowing from the ‘Glorious Revolution’ and the 1689 Bill of Rights: a new gentry of merchants and smaller landowners, of bankers and Baronets, of people whose status is determined by their income. The older aristocracy are, in Shadwell’s plays, a sort of distant myth; he writes about the upper middle class and their satellites, and writes for them too. In the epilogue to *Irish Hospitality* (1717/18) he outlines their tastes and preferences:

Lady's will smile if scenes are modest writ
 Whilst your double entenders please the pit.
 There's not a vizard sweating in the gallery
 But like a smart intrigue, a rake, and raillery.
 And were we to consult our friends above,
 A pert and witty footman, 'tis they love.
 And now and then such language as their own,
 As 'Damn you dog, you Lie!' and knock him down.
 Consider then how hard it is to show,
 Things that will do above, and please below.²⁸

To please those 'above' in the galleries and 'below' in the Pit, he draws on 'the reigning Follies of this spacious Town' to create his plays,²⁹ and, as one would expect there was considerable effort made to identify the originals of his characters. Shadwell coyly denies that this is possible in his Prologue to *The Hasty Wedding* (1716/17):

The plot and scenes are laid within this town
 The people are inventions of his own.
 For none of you can have so little wit
 As e'er to think your characters are hit.³⁰

But in the Prologue to *The Sham Prince* (1718/19), which is based on actual events,³¹ he tells us that the originals of his characters came to see themselves represented on the stage. He is at pains, however, not to alienate any sector of his audience, especially the merchant classes that now formed its backbone:

As the design was to expose a public cheat, and to show the folly of some tradesmen, who were drawn in upon that occasion, I took care to do it so, that even the people from whom I stole my characters could not take it ill, and came to see themselves represented. The play indeed might have been much better, had I but made use of the hints given me; but there were too many people of good sense and reputation concerned to be exposed: so I turned that into a comedy, which was a tragedy to many.³²

²⁸ Epilogue to *Irish Hospitality*, in *Shadwell's Works*, I, p. 203.

²⁹ Epilogue to *The Hasty Wedding*, in *Shadwell's Works*, I, p. 5.

³⁰ Prologue to *The Hasty Wedding*, in *Shadwell's Works*, I, p. 3.

³¹ Clark, *Early Irish Stage*, p. 166.

³² Preface to *The Sham Prince*, in *Shadwell's Works*, II, p. 157.

The society and sensibility demonstrated by Shadwell are a long way from the plays of William Philips: Philips lauds the superiority of the 'generous' mind; Shadwell acknowledges that superiority, but what interests him more are the successes and dangers of the 'mercenary' society.

The main character in *The Hasty Wedding*, (1716/17³³) Sir Ambrose Wealthy, is a banker, the ultimate merchant - a trader in money; Cash, his accountant, describes him as 'an honest trader'.³⁴ Sir Ambrose's character and language are formed by his wealth, and by his fear of it falling into the wrong hands. Money is his religion. He is of the opinion that his material value is the same thing as his intrinsic moral worth. Instead of prayer, Sir Ambrose begins each day with an invocation of his own value: 'Every morning, let me have a specimen of my accounts, an abstract of debtor and creditor; I love to be satisfied about my intrinsic value.'³⁵ Sir Ambrose accosts Squire Daudle, a useless young man, with the demand, 'What is your Business here?'³⁶ When he replies, 'no manner of Business only, but to...', Sir Ambrose interrupts: 'to show you're are an idle fellow I suppose'.³⁷ Idleness and Business are philosophical opposites to him because 'I set a value upon my time.'³⁸ The language of business infuses the play, whose overriding imagery is taken from commerce. Cash, Sir Ambrose's accountant, is the most extreme example of its financial language: all his lines are couched in economic metaphor. In Act 2, for example, he equates the disguised Squire Daudle to coinage illegally reduced in value: 'Good now, he was disguised; he looked very much

³³ Date given at <http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/Shadwell,C/life.htm> [accessed 10/04/02] (p 1 of 4).

³⁴ *The Hasty Wedding*, I. in *Shadwell's Works*, I, p. 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.22

defaced; he was clipt of his gentility; nobody would take him for current coin, in ditto dress.³⁹

It's not just in metaphor that commerce appears in the play: business is discussed with obsessive interest. We are left in no doubt as to the overriding commercial ethic of the characters and of the interest of the audience. In one scene, Shadwell compares the industry and thrift of the Huguenots with the indolence of the Irish. The Frenchman lives frugally, 'in hopes of gathering together as much money here, as he left behind him in France'.⁴⁰ Sir Ambrose approves heartily of such industry and attention to business: 'A good intelligible fellow this. I warrant you people of the country here grumble at these foreigners.'⁴¹ Daudle takes a pot-shot at the Irish gentry, on behalf of the local tradesmen, but Sir Ambrose displays scant sympathy for his lazy countrymen:

DAUDLE Not one morsel; we can't blame the fellows for being industrious, but we now and then curse the Gentry for letting their own countrymen starve whilst they are employing foreigners.

SIR AMBROSE If our own countrymen were but as industrious, they would not want business; but they never care to work, till they begin to grow hungry.⁴²

The only persons in the play to rise above this commercial outlook are Sir Ambrose's daughter Aurelia, and her young man, Townley. Aurelia is the moral centre of the play, and the model of correct behaviour and attitudes. Sir Ambrose considers himself and is considered by the other characters, as a member of the higher classes, but his behaviour and attitudes are a far cry from the *générosité* proposed by William Philips. Sir Ambrose's daughter however is unambiguously 'generous'. She outclasses all the other women in the play, and is in tone, manner, language and character, the pattern of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴² *The Hasty Wedding*, II. in *Shadwell's Works*, I, p. 41.

gentility. When her father arbitrarily and whimsically marries the Widow Friendless, and brings her and her daughter Herriot into his house over Aurelia's head, Shadwell compares the three women and also Lady Daudle (who comes to visit), in a scene in which he gives us different versions of female gentility. He uses the occasion to contrast proper good manners, breeding, and etiquette with the *arriviste* idea of them. The new Lady Worthy insists on being called 'Your Ladyship', because neither she nor her daughter knows any better, but Aurelia does: 'I thought it had been the height of good manners to have said Madam to the Queen herself,' she observes.⁴³ Aurelia has managed her household in a proper, distant, aristocratic manner, with her father's approval: 'she manages her expenses frugally, supplies my Family decently, and governs my servants prudently.'⁴⁴ The new Lady Worthy takes the suspicious bourgeois attitude: 'A housewife! and trust the keys to her maid, pretty management indeed.'⁴⁵

The way in which the upper classes can spot a class intruder is by what Shadwell calls 'a solecism in breeding'⁴⁶ – an involuntary lowering in language or behaviour. The Widow Friendless and her daughter make themselves ridiculous by accusing Aurelia, whereas it is their own conduct that is rife with solecisms. Mrs Friendless, the new Lady Worthy, shows us the narrow attitudes that the middle classes were carrying up to the Ascendancy with them. Independence in young women, for example, a notably aristocratic trait, is not to be encouraged: 'She has been a great while left to herself; and when young women are left to themselves, they make but awkward creatures.'⁴⁷

⁴³ *Ibid.*, IV. p. 83.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I. p. 26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, IV. p. 83.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, IV. p. 89.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, IV. p. 89.

Lady Daudle, Squire Daudle's mother, is acutely conscious of everyone's social position, including her own. She is ready to crawl to the new Lady Wealthy when Sir Ambrose's hasty wedding raises her to a higher footing on the social scale, but at the end of the play she shoves her back down the ladder to her proper place beneath her: 'Oh, the upstart creature! What an air of Quality she gave herself.'⁴⁸ The Daudles and the Friendlesses are cut from the same cloth, and like the tradesmen in *The Sham Prince*, Shadwell shows how they experience the behaviour of those above them by having them copy that behaviour when they believe they have risen a level in society.

In Shadwell's *The Plotting Lovers*, an adaptation of a play by Moliere,⁴⁹ the servant Witwould is acting the part of a gentleman to deceive the English Squire Trelooby, and he takes ironic advantage of his apparent position of gentility to criticise the behaviour resulting from such lack of breeding.: 'No Sir, as I'm a gentleman, I cannot bear such solecisms in breeding, especially to strangers in whose power it is to give an ill character to the country.'⁵⁰ In the same play, for the amusement of the upper gallery, he has Squire Trelooby give his impression of a Lady of Quality kept waiting for her coach:

TRELOOBY My coach, my coach there! Where's my coach, good Gad? How unhappy it is to have such people about one; what! Must one stay all day upon the pavement, and won't my coach come to me?...What! No Coach-man to be found? No page? We'll break the neck of this Trade; or I'll ... Page! Page! Where's the little Fool, isn't the little Fool to be found?⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, V. p. 151.

⁴⁹ Moliere's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, reduced to one act and called, *The Plotting Lovers; or, The Dismal Squire*, Smock Alley, 1719/20. This play was later adapted by Thomas Sheridan as *The Brave Irishman*, with the part of Squire Trelooby mutated into Captain O'Blunder.

⁵⁰ *The Plotting Lovers*, in *Shadwell's Works*, II, p. 331.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

The Sham Prince (1718/9) is a burlesque of nobility: a sort of twelfth-night inversion of authority, where the lower classes take on the behaviour and attitudes of their betters, and demonstrate to us by this device their resentment of the world of nepotism and corruption in which the upper classes coast along by exploiting those below them. Dublin and Irish society is viewed in the play through a complex arrangement of ironic lenses. Shadwell presents to us the layers of society: the Nobility 'appear very fine and very gallant, but they never pay their debts, and they will pawn their honour for a quid of tobacco',⁵² the Private Gentlemen 'are a very good sort of people, only they are always drunk',⁵³ merchants and tradesmen are:

Very idle, very prodigal: imitating the gentlemen, and their wives put on Quality airs, wear gold watches, drink tea out of silver tea-pots, and visit one another with as much ceremony and formality as if they kept assemblies.⁵⁴

This group portrait is painted in an inverted, ironic way, as Shadwell pretends he is describing German society, which is mean-spirited, corrupt and grasping; Irish society is ironically invoked as the pattern of virtue called for by Philips:

CHEATLY Our men of Quality here are known, not by fine clothes and equipages, but by strict Virtue, Honour, and Integrity. [...] Here sobriety is the distinguishing quality of a gentleman. [...] Our tradesmen are sober, painstaking, laborious men, and their wives, most of them, assist their husbands in the way of trade, and are no gadders abroad.⁵⁵

The argument is conducted, however, as a competition of frauds: a footman pretending to be the ambassador of the Princess of Passau attempting to deceive an even bigger fraud, Cheatly, who is simultaneously deceiving society and being deceived himself.

⁵² Trip, *The Sham Prince*, IV. p. 224.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

The audience's viewpoint overrides all of these in an ironic appreciation of the sarcastic, equivocal praise that is being heaped on Irish society

The rising mercantile class that is central to the comedies is threatened by imposters and Fortune hunters; its Capital is not yet safely locked away in land and its social antennae are still not fully tuned. *The Sham Prince* is the most notable of a line of plays dealing with the fragile gentility of Dublin, the ease of fooling provincial opinion, and the unease felt by the Anglo-Irish about their provincial status and perceptions. How can they be sure that the outward show of gentility does not conceal a different underlying reality? The problem is made acute by Dublin's removal from the hub of fashion and culture, and being, therefore, the target for all kinds of chancers on the prowl. It is no accident that the imposters in the plays are almost always English. As late as 1790, Irish newspapers were carefully pointing out that many of the criminals and con artists in the city dressed well and spoke with English accents. *The Hibernian Magazine* of February that year reports that:

Dublin at this moment swarms with a flight of English sharpers – adepts in the mysteries of their profession in the arts of shop-lifting, pocket-picking, ring-dropping, swindling and coming. They assume all shapes and appearances – clergymen – farmers – horse-jockies – agents – riders – and are straight or deformed, young or old, lame or otherwise just as occasion suits.⁵⁶

Sir Ambrose Wealthy, in *The Hasty Wedding*, is particularly paranoid about the possibility of his fortune or his daughter being stolen; to him his daughter and his ducats are practically the same thing: who steals the one steals the other. The fear of cheaters and sharpers is a very bourgeois one; the hard-working merchants are afraid that they will work all their lives to make money and some rogue will walk off with it without

⁵⁶Constantia Maxwell, p.15.

breaking into a sweat. They are terrified by the idea that the wealth they laboured to accumulate will be squandered by some plausible scoundrel, and everyone will laugh at them in their graves, their lives' work wasted. Their faulty sensors for imposters are a great cause of concern for them, whereas the settled gentry can spot them a mile off, like Trueman in *The Sham Prince*. A father with a nubile daughter and money in easily realizable assets, like Sir Ambrose, is in the most vulnerable position.

Sir Ambrose is the embodiment of mercantile uneasiness: every morning he says the Banker's Creed, while at the same time agonizing over the vulnerable spot in his defences, his unmarried daughter:

I know the true value of half-a-crown, but yet am not niggardly of a pound, but what would vex me in my grave, to have my fortune fall into the hands of a rake-hell, one that wou'd throw away my money first, and my daughter afterwards.⁵⁷

The irony is that his daughter is quite well able to exercise her own judgement. Young girls with money in plays need to keep their wits about them, and they are usually protected or immunised by being emotionally attached already to someone who is suitable personally and emotionally, but not financially; the action of the plays is to bring them into line financially as well. It is Sir Ambrose himself who falls for the confidence trickster. His suspicious nature and distrust of Aurelia, and all women, combine to give him the bourgeois banker's nightmare:

But Aurelia is a woman – and a woman's a fool – and a fool dotes on a coxcomb – and a coxcomb will spend my estate like a puppy – and everybody will say I was a blockhead for taking pains to get it for him.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *The Hasty Wedding*, I. p.10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Sir Ambrose's money has an almost physical presence in *The Hasty Wedding*: it oppresses some and attracts others. While Aurelia is the heir she is watched and defended, as if she were the Estate incarnate, and once she is disinherited, she feels a load has been lifted:

And what is the greatest pleasure of all to me: I that was tired out of my life about marriage, and the fear of being stole, may now be trusted out alone; I shall be brought down to a moderate Fortune for a private gentleman, and never will be forced to marry the man I don't like.⁵⁹

When Herriot's mother, the Widow Friendless, marries Sir Ambrose, and Herriot becomes the heir, she has to be kept under surveillance as well; she has risen from being a girl to being a 'Fortune.': 'Now she is become a Fortune, there will be spies about her, and it will be hard to get opportunities of being alone with her', mourns Dareall.⁶⁰ But nobody is so oppressed by his money as Sir Ambrose himself: it leads him into all sorts of suspicions and foolishness, and into the bizarre 'hasty wedding' of the title.

But the point is made repeatedly that his suspicions are legitimate and well-founded: scoundrels abound. 'Stealing' heiresses was a growing problem, and plausible imposters were a constant nightmare for a family with a marriageable heiress. The kidnapping and rape of Mary Ware in an attempt to force her into marriage in 1668 caused a major scandal.⁶¹ In *The Sham Prince* there is a disturbing suggestion that the whole process of deception and 'stealing' an heiress has become reified as a viable financial speculation: Trueman is distressed by the attention paid by Cheatly to his Araminta, and says, 'I am well assured, 'tis all designed to gain my Araminta, some usurer has advanced money on the intended project.'⁶² In *The Hasty Wedding* a letter found in the basket of the

⁵⁹ *The Hasty Wedding*, IV. p. 76.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, V. p. 143.

⁶¹ Chap. II, p. 82., n. 42.

⁶² *The Sham Prince*, I. p. 168.

procuress, Mrs. Go-between, proposes a financial deal depending on the success of the deception:

*I am certain she has two thousand pound. Give her the letter, but don't let her know I am turned out of the army; you may call me Major, or Colonel which you will; what's done must be done quick, for my tailor swears he will arrest me before Saturday night. You know I am not worth a groat, and if I am sent to jail, there I must lie. If I succeed you shall certainly have a hundred pound.*⁶³

It wasn't just the men who were plying the trade. Another letter in Mrs. Go-between's basket gives the female side:

*Dear Gobetween, wait upon my Lord; I hear he is very flush of money. Persuade him I have eloped from my husband somewhere in the North. The Counsellor before he turned me off equipped me with very handsome clothes, and my lodgings are genteel. Upon my honour I am sound: for I have lain with no one but the Brig. this two months; manage this matter well, and Poz you shall go halves.*⁶⁴

The language of adultery and intrigue is laced with the metaphor of commerce: the investment is 'sound' and taking a hand in it will gain a half of the yield, while 'sound' also indicates freedom from venereal disease.

Deception and imposture occur at every turn in Shadwell's plays, people acting a part in order to exploit the unwary and snap up an easy fortune. The penalties were severe: Shirley, the guilty party in the Mary Ware affair, absconded to escape hanging, and his estates were confiscated. Sir Ambrose, in *The Hasty Wedding*, threatens the disguised Squire Daudle:

⁶³ *The Hasty Wedding*, II. p. 61.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Doest thou know, Sirrah, that I can hang thee, my daughter is an heiress; now that dismal dog the *Squire*, has laid a scheme for stealing her, thou, being an accessory to the fact, shall be hanged as well as he.⁶⁵

The possible penalties, though, apparently did nothing to discourage the fortune-hunters. Church-going was particularly infested with them. Sir Ambrose fulminates against their activities:

What shoals of fortune-hunters frequent our Church! Fellows who, because Nature has made 'em six foot high, set themselves up to auction, not to be sold by inch of candle, but by dint of impudence, moulded into the shape of a woman's fine gentleman, at the charge of a tailor and a seamstress; they push fair for a coach-and-six; if they miss it, a jail's the word.⁶⁶

Lady Homebred, in *The Sham Prince*, in order to protect her daughters, has abandoned Church-going completely in favour of the Dissenters' Chapel, though Araminta hints that it is because she won't spend money on the proper clothes:

LADY HOMEBRED Mercy on me, I should be out of my wits, should any fellows stare at my daughters.
 ARAMINTA That's the reason, I suppose, you have left going to Church, and have forced 'em to the Meeting.
 LADY HOMEBRED Why, no fluttering, foolish young fellows come thither; people meet only to be devout.
 ARAMINTA In a slovenly manner, truly.
 LADY HOMEBRED 'Tis more decent, Cousin, than when a whole shoal of young fellows, who are always staring women out of countenance; and because they have no religion themselves, they would divert other people from it.⁶⁷

The imposter and fortune-hunter in *The Hasty Wedding* is Jack Ombre, an English sharper, lurking behind the disguise of Sir John Dareall, who is described by Townley as: 'a famous tat-monger that eats when the dice run high, and starves when they don't.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, I. p.10.

⁶⁷ *The Sham Prince*, I. p. 173.

[...] He is of the race of cheats, that scorn to get their living any way but by imposing upon other peoples' understandings.'⁶⁸ Idle fellows are prowling Tories, unwilling to buckle down to honest endeavour; such chancers are anathema to hard-working Whig merchants. So much so that when Sir John Dareall is found out, and he pleads *noblesse oblige* – 'I beg you would not expose me, for I am a gentleman, tho' an unfortunate younger brother' – ⁶⁹ he gets short shrift from these gentlemen-merchants, who are the primary target of such schemes, and feel no class solidarity at all with him:

SIR AMBROSE. So much the worse for that; when gentlemen turn rogues, they always prove the greatest, and ought to be made the greatest examples. Therefore away with him to Justice Quibus.⁷⁰

Sir John's authentic, genteel, English manner seduces Sir Ambrose, but he also worms into his affections because he speaks fluent Business, especially the business of Matrimony. He tells Sir Ambrose he broke off his match in Somersetshire, not for any sentimental, moral or social reason, but because it would have been a bad bargain: his prospective father-in-law would only give six thousand pounds with his daughter, yet wanted fifteen hundred a year settled on her out of her future husband's estate, which only brought in two thousand a year. So that, after four years, she would become a net drain on her husband's finances:

I was to have parted with the six thousand pound, to have paid my sisters' Portions, and I have but two thousand pound a year in all, so that in case of my mortality, I might have left half a dozen children starving upon the five hundred a year, whilst my young gay widow, would have been flaunting it about, upon the fifteen hundred.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *The Hasty Wedding*, V. p. 149. 'Tat' has a double-meaning: 1: a die, usually a loaded one, and 2: 'rag' or 'junk.'; 'monger' expresses the disdain of the business community for his activities.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁰ *The Hasty Wedding*, V. p. 150.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, I. p. 20.

Sir Ambrose is both a loving father and a mean tyrant: at all times, he thinks and speaks like a merchant: there is a monetary value on everything, even his daughter, and he cannot help his belief that it is the economic side of marriage that is the most crucial. When he tries, clumsily, to speak to Aurelia about the sentimental side, he is overtaken by his business instincts:

I know it is not an Equipage, or a Title, can comfort you - neither is it a great deal of money can do your business; but a man of sense, a man of humanity, a man of good nature - and a man that can come up to a round settlement; a Smithfield bargain, girl - there lies the great comfort of matrimony.⁷²

He outlines his ideal of marital bliss for the benefit of Dareall; his instinct always carries him in one direction: 'a little beauty, a little love, and a great deal of money, are admirable ingredients together'.⁷³

Aurelia complains mildly about not being trusted by her father: 'I beg, Sir, you will not be uneasy about my conduct. 'Tis time enough to complain when I have done a foolish action.'⁷⁴ Shadwell does not share the profound distrust of the judgement and virtue of women expressed by the men in his plays. He examines the position of women in this society from a variety of angles; the status of women and the negotiation of their inferior economic position is a theme in all of them. What he gives us is a range of unmarried young women, from the free Araminta, to the servile Miss Sevelle, both in *The Sham Prince*, and a range of variations in between. We are also given different views of a widow's position, but very few married women; in fact, Lady Daudle is the only one of any significance. In *The Sham Prince* there are allusions to merry widows and wives who are kept on a short leash, because they would embarrass their husbands

⁷² *Ibid.*, I. p. 13.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, I. p. 26.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, II. p. 48.

if they had too much money and freedom: 'I know my own income to a shilling,' boasts Welldon, 'and will supply her with just money enough to appear in the Quality which becomes my wife.'⁷⁵ Marriage may be the goal of the women, as Lady Homebred's daughters demonstrate, in that they see it as setting them free, but the delights of marriage are surpassed by the freedom of a young widow with a decent jointure.

Shadwell does not care for wives: Welldon, quoted above, continues: 'and what puts my friendship out of doubt, you have no wife for me to debauch.'⁷⁶ In the Prologue to *The Hasty Wedding*, Shadwell remarks:

*If for two nights we can your persons see,
'Tis well, a play becomes a wife in three.
So cold, so careless you to us appear.*⁷⁷

At the end of the this play Sir Ambrose has cause to 'rejoice abominably'⁷⁸ when he is freed from his hasty marriage to Mrs. Friendless: 'I tremble when I think of the Danger I have escaped; a termagant wife is the nearest resemblance to the Devil, that ever I met with.'⁷⁹ The shortage of wives in Shadwell's plays is balanced by an abundance of unmarried women and widows. It seems to be taken for granted that the women will pass from the one stage to the other, without much in between, and that it is vital to ensure that the correct settlement is put into place before the marriage, to accommodate the widow after it is over. It looks like Shadwell was using his plays to plant a little subliminal advertising for his business of Widows' and Orphans' Assurance.

⁷⁵ *The Sham Prince*, I. p 165.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁷⁷ Prologue to *The Hasty Wedding*, in *Shadwell's Works*, I, p. 3.

⁷⁸ *The Hasty Wedding*, V. p. 152.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

The Hasty Wedding and other plays mark an apprehension by Shadwell, and on the part of his characters, of a disillusionment at marriage by women, which we may also presume to reflect an interrogation of the institution among members of the audience. This is tied to the question of the value placed on women. Sir Ambrose says of Aurelia: 'I can give her as good a fortune as any private man in the Kingdom.'⁸⁰ This is the value she has for him, and as a merchant, if he invests so much money in her, he expects a commensurate return from the prospective groom. The men in the plays tend also to define themselves by their financial value. Welldon in *The Sham Prince* boasts of his approach to matrimony, and in a way which implies that the female side are equally mercenary:

There are two or three very agreeable women in Dublin, either of which I could drag a chain with well enough, but my way of making love is, I send in the Rent Roll of my estate, a list of my debts and incumbrances, the jointure I can make, and the money I expect.⁸¹

Sir Ambrose harries his daughter constantly with her economic helplessness: 'I would have you do nothing against your inclinations; but if your inclinations run contrary to mine, you will be turned out of doors, and you may go starve, my dear.'⁸² She is an asset, who could turn into a liability if not closely guarded. His distrust of his daughter is founded on his distrust of women in general:

'Tis well resolved, were there such a thing as prudence belonging to your sex; but when gentlewomen marry footmen, ladies fall in love with coachmen, and widows ruin their first brood to make way for a second, who can depend upon a woman's resolutions? I know you all have a natural tendency to virtue, and many of you with pains and care are so, but there is pride and vanity, flesh and blood, hat and feather, the world and the devil, to

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸¹ *The Sham Prince*, I. p. 165.

⁸² *The Hasty Wedding*, II. p. 50.

encounter with, and nothing but a virtue, and a weak woman, to stand against 'em all.⁸³

This attitude that women are not to be trusted with their own interests is adopted by the male characters, to a large extent, but the action of the plays negates it. The irony is that it is Sir Ambrose himself who is the fool that dotes on the Coxcomb, Sir John Dareall, and who is totally infatuated with his apparent financial charms: 'He's a jewel of a man – such an estate – and if you prove but a little coming, he will make such a jointure, that thou hast happiness thrown into the very mouth of thee.'⁸⁴ What he sees is the perfect match, not of two persons, but of two fortunes.

Aurelia, however, has her rights, and states her position openly to Dareall: 'My father may, when he pleases, command me not to marry; but it is never in his power to command me to marry.'⁸⁵ This puts a different slant on her father's bullying: he can only apply pressure indirectly, by using his economic advantage like a weapon against her: she has the invincible shield of refusal. There is a sense here of a negotiation, within the audience and the society about the rights and position of women in the family and in matrimony. Aurelia is certainly offended by overhearing the men bargaining for her; the female part of the audience, of which Shadwell was acutely conscious, must have shared her outrage when she protests to her father at such treatment: 'What Sir, am I to be bargained and sold to a stranger, without ever being consulted in the matter.'⁸⁶

SIR AMBROSE I will lay down ten thousand pound, with some trinkets
 and jewels that shall be nameless; I will settle all that I have at my death
 on you, and the heirs of her body, and I will not be unkind in my lifetime.
AURELIA (*aside*) Poor miserable creature, 'tis dismal to hear the bargain
 made.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, I. p. 12.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, II. p. 30.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, III. p. 50.

SIR JOHN Most generously offered, Sir Ambrose, and not to be behind-hand with you, I will jointure her in a thousand pound a year, settle Hartwell Hall on her, with all the plate, and jewels for her life; and allow her three hundred pound a year pin money.

SIR AMBROSE Fairly closed, Sir John, it is a match.⁸⁷

The contrast between the apprehension Sir Ambrose has of Sir John, and Aurelia's opinion of him, is acute. To her, this stranger that her father dotes on is ridiculous. In Shadwell's plays, as in Philips', a 'man of sense' is the ideal marriage partner, often invoked, but in very short supply. Mostly it is the women who show the greatest understanding and sensibility, while their suitors, having left the bargaining table, approach them on some elevated plane of ludicrous sentimentality. Aurelia, like the other young women, find the expressions of the gallants to be so exaggerated and formal as to be meaningless: She condemns Dareall's declaration to be 'Romantick', 'Heroick', and 'Comical'.⁸⁸ Araminta, in *The Sham Prince* repeatedly berates her suitor Trueman for his elevated theatricality: 'Prithee, none of your Fustian to me.'⁸⁹ Penelope in *Irish Hospitality* cannot take her suitor seriously on account of his high-toned, foreign, style of wooing: 'To make a goddess of a poor country girl, I have no Patience, I cannot bear it.'⁹⁰ In the eyes of the women the suitors that are economically attractive, like Sir Jowler Kennel in *Irish Hospitality*, are ridiculous on a personal level, and it is clear that Shadwell sympathises and shares this opinion. Aurelia speaks for, and to, the female part of the audience; when threatened by her father she states the sentimental ideal: "'Tis better living in a cottage with the man we love, then in a coach-and-six with him we hate.'⁹¹ She stands on her own value as a person and a woman, and resists, on the one hand, the commodification forced on her by a mercenary society, and on the other, the

⁸⁷ *The Hasty Wedding*, II. p. 49.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸⁹ *The Sham Prince*, V. p. 259.

⁹⁰ *Irish Hospitality*, III. p. 254.

⁹¹ *The Hasty Wedding*, III. p. 66.

equally false sentimental hyperbole addressed to her by her notably un-heroic suitors.

Charles Shadwell had his early plays presented at Drury Lane,⁹² and came under the patronage of the Butlers of Ormond while serving in Portugal under Major-General Newton, to whom he dedicated his play *The Humours of the Army*, and to whose wife he dedicated his collected works on publication in 1720. In 1713 Shadwell set up in business in Dublin, as an insurance broker in William Street,⁹³ and managed to write a play a year from 1715 to 1720. The prologues and epilogues to his plays refer to this annual phenomenon. In the Prologue to *The Hasty Wedding* he writes:

*Encouraged by your last year's kind Applause
Our Poet once again submits his Cause.*⁹⁴

and in the epilogue to the same play:

*Gallants, the Poet sends me as a spy,
To listen how you liked his Comedy
And bid me try, if I could draw you in;
To promise you'd come here next year again.*⁹⁵

He produced five plays set in Ireland for Smock Alley. In the 'Dedication' that precedes his published plays, he writes: 'The following scenes have several of them been acted originally upon the Dublin Theatre; there has been very few attempts of this nature in

⁹² *The Fair Quaker of Deal* in 1710, and *The Merry Wives of Broad Street* in 1713.

⁹³ 'Office of Assurance for the Support of Widows and Orphans', advertisement in *The Dublin Intelligencer*, Dec 19, 1713; in Helen M Burke, *Riotous Performances, The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theatre, 1712-1784* (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p 68.

⁹⁴ Prologue to *The Hasty Wedding*, II, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Epilogue to *The Hasty Wedding*, II, p. 5.

Ireland.⁹⁶ Three are set in Dublin: *The Hasty Wedding*, (1716 or 1717), *The Sham Prince* (1718/1719), and *The Plotting Lovers* (1719-1720); *Irish Hospitality* (1717/1718) is set in Fingall, and the fifth is the historical play *Rotherick O'Connor* (1719/1720). All of these, with his earlier works and poems, were published in Dublin in 1720, with a dedication to Lady Newton, acknowledging her crucial role in patronising the theatre and supporting his plays, and incidentally telling us that the Butlers of Ormond were aligned now with the 'patriot' faction of the Anglo-Irish gentry, while, at the same time, commiserating with her on

Your noble partner's indisposition. May Heaven prolong his days, and continue him a patriot of his country, a title which has been for many ages joined to the noble family of the *Butlers*.⁹⁷

This dedication discharges his obligation to his patrons, but other elements in Irish society were also involved in the publication; the plays were published by subscription, and the subscription list is included in the book. There are one hundred and sixty subscribers listed; one subscriber even ordered ten copies. The list is a Who's Who of Irish society, headed by Lady Newton herself and a few representatives of the peerage: the Earl of Antrim, for example. It includes a fair number of the gentry – knights and baronets, some Honourables and Rt. Honourables, and a sprinkling of military Colonels and Captains. But by far the biggest number come from the area where gentry and bourgeois intertwine, the area of Mister and Esquire, and there is also a small number of merchants openly listed by the title, '*Mer*'. Furthermore, the list is given alphabetically, not ordered hierarchically, a significantly egalitarian move.

⁹⁶ 'Dedication to Lady Newton', in *Shadwell's Works*, I, p. iv.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.vi.

The egalitarianism of Shadwell manifests itself also in the main focus in his plays on elements from the upper bourgeois and the lower gentry. This shift is common in drama at the period in England, but is surprising in the context of the popularity of the Heroic Drama in Ireland up to that time, and it indicates the waning of the influence of the 'grands seigneurs' of the Viceregal Court, and the rise of the Whigs, the party of the 'Glorious Revolution'.

Locke's teachings became the gospel of the supporters of William of Orange, who mutated into the Whigs, the proponents of change and conditional monarchy. Throughout the eighteenth century Locke's influence held great sway among the Protestants of Ireland, most of whom took the Whig side in the political war of attrition between the Whigs, who considered themselves the vanguard of the Enlightenment, and the Tories, who clung to a more rigid, hierarchical ideal. This conflict caused much uproar in the theatres, in Parliament, and on the streets throughout the century.

The archetypal Whig play was *Tamerlane* (1701) by Nicholas Rowe; of its eponymous hero, Canfield says:

Tamerlane indeed portrays the ideal bourgeois leader, the constitutional monarch, *primus inter pares*, contrasted with his class antithesis, the absolutist monarch Bajazet, whom the new ideology portrays as a runaway autocrat bound by no laws, human or divine.⁹⁸

In 1714, after the death of Queen Anne and the overthrow of a Tory ministry in Ireland and England, Stockwell tells us:

⁹⁸ J. Douglas Canfield, 'Shifting Tropes of Ideology in English Serious Drama, Late Stuart to Early Georgian', in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth Century English Theater*, ed. by J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah C. Payne (Athens Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 195-227 (p. 198).

About 400 gentlemen, the Lord Mayor and 20 Aldermen marched through the city and replaced King William's truncheon in his statue at College Green. Afterwards they attended the performance of *Tamerlane* complete with Garth's prologue, 'without interruption' and 'to the great satisfaction of all the company.'⁹⁹

Tamerlane had been banned during the Tory administration that controlled the last four years of Queen Anne's reign from 1710 to 1714, but from 1714 on, it staged a triumphant return in London and in Dublin.¹⁰⁰ It was a triumphalist Whig choice for the Dublin Ascendancy to make, and the performance of Garth's Prologue, 'without interruption', is an infallible sign of Whig supremacy. That "Prologue for the 4th of November 1711" had been written by a fanatical Whig called Samuel Garth. When Ashbury, the Smock Alley manager, applied to the Lords Justices for permission to present it, they, being Tories, refused. On William of Orange's birthday the following year, 1712, Ashbury applied again and was again refused, and this time it provoked the first known riot in the Dublin theatre. Dublin was a Whig town but there was a substantial Tory minority that was reluctant to accept the legitimacy of the House of Orange. Constantia Maxwell cites the case of the Trinity College student who, when accepting his M.A. degree, made a truculent speech in which he questioned the right of Queen Anne to her throne. 'Healts', she adds, 'were openly drunk to the Pretender. The truncheon was stolen from the hand of King William in College Green.'¹⁰¹ Some of the ladies on the night of the *Tamerlane* riot wore red roses 'in Honour of the English Nation',¹⁰² while the opposition sported orange ornaments. These were probably the 'great Whig and Tory' patches referred to by Shadwell in *The Hasty Wedding*.¹⁰³ A

⁹⁹ Stockwell, p. 153.

¹⁰⁰ Lindsay, David W. & Hampden, John, eds., *The Beggar's Opera and other Eighteenth Century Plays*, (London: J.M. Dent, 1974) (first pub. Everyman's Library, 1928), p. vi:

'The three main phases of political influence can be defined by reference to the theatrical career of an archetypal Whig play, Rowe's *Tamerlane*: having been performed intermittently until 1710, this work was excluded from the repertoire during the last four years of Queen Anne's reign, but performed several times each season from 1715 onwards.'

¹⁰¹ Constantia Maxwell, p. 182.

¹⁰² Clark, p. 129.

¹⁰³ *The Hasty Wedding*, II. p. 50.

leading Dublin Whig climbed on to the stage and delivered the Prologue himself, in which he berated the 'red rose' brigade, who 'ask his protection, but yet grudge his Power',¹⁰⁴ at which the Tory contingent took umbrage, and disturbances broke out in the audience until the soldiers stationed on the stage came down and restored order. Some of the leading Whigs were charged with rioting; Ashbury testified against them, but the case was thrown out by a sympathetic jury.

In spite of the inroads the English Parliament was making on their independence, and the indifference or hostility of successive constitutional monarchs, the Whig state of mind suited the Protestant Irish best, as implying their ultimate right to make their own decisions and regulate their own affairs. The Whigs were also unashamedly the party that supported the expansion of commerce and business, without being too scrupulous ethically, and Dublin was, as Shadwell shows us, a mercantile society.¹⁰⁵ Shadwell's *The Sham Prince* is an openly Whig play for a Whig audience, presented in 1718 or 1719. The nature of absolute authority is lampooned and the superiority of rule based on the rights of the citizens and the common good asseverated. The dominant note is sounded at the start, when the Prologue invokes the image of King James fleeing from the Boyne about twenty five years previously, and strongly states the case against the absolutism of the Stuarts and other despots:

*The night before that ever glorious day,
His Highness, very fairly ran away.
[...]
Despotic princes will do what they please,
And ne'er consult the harmless subjects' case.*

¹⁰⁴ Clark, p.130.

¹⁰⁵ Swift, as a committed Tory, detested the Whigs: Van Doren, 'Editor's Introduction', in *The Portable Swift*, p. 15:

'They were for him, only a brawling faction, hungry for profits, and not more than a tenth of England. [...] Having made their fortunes at the expense of the majority, [they] meant to go on making other fortunes, and would stop at no lying, no plotting no uprising, no overthrowing which might serve their factious ends.'

*They come, they go, and never tell the cause,
Their arbitrary will is still their laws.*¹⁰⁶

The play develops as a fable of trust and deception, carried along on an undercurrent of Whig ideology that frequently bubbles to the surface. The main action of the play is that the pretender, Cheatly, seems to be a prince, and is accepted as one as long as he furthers the interests of his followers; if the deception had continued to serve their purposes, they would have been quite happy to prolong their allegiance, but once he is perceived to put his own interests before that of his subjects, their trust in him fails and his authority collapses; he no longer serves their purpose and they remove him.

The Sham Prince is filled with Whiggish metaphors and allusions. Cheatly, on becoming Prince of Passau, begins to take on the negative attributes of a Tory despot: 'The princes of Germany are all arbitrary, their will is their law.'¹⁰⁷ This is contrasted with the robust Whiggery of the bailiffs who come to arrest him, to whom nobody is above the law, not even a king: 'We an't afraid of a prince; we have arrested your kings and princes too before now.'¹⁰⁸ In embracing the Tory way and declaring their fealty to the Sham Prince, Shred the Tailor and Kersey the Draper, demean themselves, and negate their dignity and liberty as citizens:

KERSEY	And so we humbly take our leaves.
SHRED	Ay, and there lives not people on earth, so much your worms as
we. ¹⁰⁹	

The play is bracketed with examples of Whig propaganda. The Prologue called up the image of James II running from the Boyne, and when, at the end of the play, the Sham

¹⁰⁶ Prologue, *The Sham Prince*, p. 159.

¹⁰⁷ Sevelle, *The Sham Prince*, II. p. 197.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, First Bailiff, III. 2. p. 214.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, IV. p. 229.

Prince also runs away, he sends back a letter whose comic insolence is an open declaration of Tory doctrine. In it, he equates himself with the Stuart Pretender, and sees nothing amiss in having his actions governed by a whim. In a truly regal stroke, he signs himself as 'William', and in a grand Ubu-like finale, claims to be lodging at the Court of St. James in London, before taking over as King of Sicily:

Sovereign Powers often do things out of the way, which appear whimsical to their subjects, but I charge you all upon your allegiance, not to censure my sudden departure, as an act of folly, indiscretion, or trick; for I had received certain information that the Government would seize me, some people having told them I was the Pretender; had I been caught I should have been beheaded immediately. I shall stay a few days at St. James's, to concert measures, and I think you will hear no more from me, till I am settled in the Kingdom of Sicily, which I now tell you, I am declared king of.

Yours,

William.¹¹⁰

The Sham Prince implies, as do all of Shadwell's plays, that the nobility have been superseded now that the Revolution has succeeded, and that the risen bourgeoisie, in the form of 'Private Gentlemen,' merchants and landed gentry up to the rank of Baronet are the new powers in the country. For five years Shadwell interrogated Irish society in his plays: city society in Dublin, county society in Fingall, and the historical legitimacy of Anglo-Irish civilization. The five plays he left are the first extended portrayal of the Anglo-Irish; but Shadwell deals only with the gentry and the higher, middle and lower bourgeoisie. The mantra of 'nobility and gentry' that is frequently invoked throughout the eighteenth century is deceptive; the list of subscribers to Shadwell's works indicates that those who have sufficient interest in the theatre to subscribe to his publication are for the most part the middle and merchant classes. This is the evidence that his plays evince too: the nobility are few and far between, nobody from the peerage appears in

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, V. p. 257.

them; the bourgeois are the new gentry.¹¹¹ Shadwell's patrons may be the Butlers, but he never sets his dramatic sights that high, preferring to draw on the strands of society he is well acquainted with.

Not surprisingly for someone involved in the insurance business, *trust* is the theme of *The Sham Prince* - its necessity for business and society, and the pernicious, corrosive effects of its abuse. The play ranges over the spread of bourgeois society, from tradesmen to the upper gentry, and charts their attitudes to the nobility, who are seen as a separate entity, hardly visible from this sector of society. To Shadwell, the abstract quality of trust, rather than money, is the membrane that holds business together, and it is also the force that holds society together, as Hobbes taught. The desire of moving up the social ladder is the motivation of the characters in *The Sham Prince*, and they can move as long as trust holds. When that fails, it all comes tumbling down. It is not simply appearance that matters, he says, but the willing acceptance of appearance by the observers: 'Now that I look at him again', wails Nancy Homebred, 'he has not one bit the Air of a Prince.'¹¹² In this deception, the deceived are complicit.

With an aristocrat in place at the top of the ladder, the benefits spill down to all those who are attached to him at a lower level. The tradesmen and merchants are shown to be exploited as much by their own credulousness and greed as by the upper classes. The Sham Prince fills a need in their psyche and business universe. The structure of trust and credit is shown to be dependent on patronage of this sort: if a tradesman or merchant can crawl into the shade of a great man, his fortune is made, not from the amount he gets

¹¹¹ The nobility consists of the five ranks of the Peerage: duke, marquis, earl, viscount, & baron. Baronets are the highest rank of Private Gentlemen, or Gentry, but do not belong to the Nobility.

¹¹² *The Sham Prince*, V. p. 253.

from above, but because of the business he can generate from below. Kersey the draper, and Shred the tailor make the point clearly:

KERSEY Well really Sir, trading is so very dead and my clothes lie so long in my shop that I am ashamed to see 'em; and so upon that account, we are willing to trust anybody, for it looks as if we had a brisk trade, and keeps up our Credit amongst our neighbours. And when a Dunn presses me for money, it is a good answer to tell him that Lord Such-a-one, and Sir John Thing-em, and Mr. Whadicalum are prodigiously in my debt, and so I get rid of him.

SHRED And so we stitch up one another.¹¹³

This is gentrification by attachment; they will achieve position, acquire wealth (or credit) simply by proximity to greatness; birth is not seen by them as relevant. Perception of status is all that counts. The perceived possibility was that anyone within the Irish Protestant community could rise to the higher niches in society that they see modelled for them, a perception that Brian Friel reworks for the Catholic community after Emancipation in *Aristocrats*; to Eamon, in that play, the O'Donnells in the Big House are an aspiration made visible.

The outlook of the lower classes in *The Sham Prince* is one of cringing reverence for nobility. Shadwell's plainly is not; his outlook is remarkably democratic. What the play shows to the audience is the absurdity of a social system depending on the patronage of the nobility rather than the rising bourgeoisie standing on their own merits and abilities and eliminating the nobility's role altogether, since, socially, they are hardly visible anyway. His treatment of the tradesmen is not unsympathetic: he shows them as humble strands in the economic fabric, woven through the other threads, and trying to make a living for themselves within a society which functions on trust but where trust can be easily misplaced or abused.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, V. p. 244.

The Sham Prince is built from an elaborate interweaving of trust and deception. What we are presented with in the play is an imposture reflected back on itself and intensified. The Cheatlys, father and son, are pretending to be gentlemen who have newly come into a title and estate. The son has taken to calling himself Sir William, but this does not fool the real gentlemen in the play. Sir Bullet Airy and his friends Welldon and Trueman know that Cheatly is no Gentleman, and that the whole structure is a cheat. They resolve to make him look ridiculous by exploiting his greed for social position and fooling him into thinking that his imposture falls short, that he is in reality even grander, not just genteel but royal, and on the point of becoming Prince of Passau. Cheatly falls completely for the deception. The reflected imposture fools himself; his abuse of society's trust is punished by using his own trust in it to bring him low. Cheatly, in attempting to fool the town, is fooled by his own magnified reflection and demonstrates his lack of gentility and breeding by being fooled by Trip's false gentleman. The elaborate ruse succeeds beyond the expectation of the perpetrators and a number of other characters are sucked into it. Society is a web and every part affects and supports every other one; the creation of a nobleman, even a false one, has an effect on all of those connected to him. This gives Shadwell the opportunity to show Cheatly's interpretation of royal behaviour, and the conduct of the lower classes when raised by his proximity, especially the rich merchants, the Sevelles, who lose a great deal of money when duped by Cheatly into venturing their capital and social aspirations on a false prospectus, designed to steal their fortune and their daughter. Mr. Sevelle complains to Cheatly's father about the failure of his investment:

I hope I am not imposed upon, but I am informed that your son has no fortune, nor title; 'tis all a pretence, in order to steal my daughter. Have I launched out so much money, with the hopes of the Lord knows what, which

is to happen the Lord knows when, and so I am used the Lord knows how.
 114

The Prologue asserts that the tradesmen suffered, not just because of their innate gullibility, but because of their willingness to go along with the Tory pretensions of Cheatly, instead of standing square on their own dignity as citizens:

*They strait proved Courtiers, and good Places got,
 And kept them, till his Highness spoiled the plot.
 They all grew great, and put on proud Behaviour.*¹¹⁵

But while they are the ones who suffer financially, almost everyone is fooled and doubly fooled, by the pretensions of Cheatly and the imposture of Trip, the Footman, as the Ambassador from Passau.

Trip can sham gentility; Cheatly has awarded himself a title, but everybody is giving themselves airs, and pretending or aspiring - which is much the same thing - to a higher station:

SHRED Tradesmen! Tell him a couple of gentlemen want to speak with
 him, for I am a gentleman tailor, and all the world knows that a draper is
 a better man than I.¹¹⁶

There are no old aristocrats in the play; what we are given is mostly an elaborate structure of aspiration and pretence – everybody putting themselves up a class or two, giving Shadwell the opportunity to comment on those classes by their imitative behaviour. He doesn't put royalty and nobility on the stage and lampoon them; he puts their imitations on the stage and performs a double analysis – on the imposters and on

¹¹⁴ *The Sham Prince*, II. p.185.

¹¹⁵ Prologue, *The Sham Prince*, p. 158.

¹¹⁶ *The Sham Prince*, III. p. 204.

the real thing. Cheatly tries to act like a prince, Sevelle like a courtier, others as lord this or that. As in *The Hasty Wedding*, the Ascendancy is being satirized and criticized without ever making an appearance.

The Whig philosophy of trust and self-reliance, articulated in the main theme of the play, is expressed as well in other ways: the whole idea of trust that underlines the political theme crops up as well in the private relations between Lady Homebred and her daughters. In contrast to their cousin Araminta, who is free to decide her own actions, and decides well, Lady Homebred keeps her daughters on a very tight leash, and they defy her by going behind her back and asserting their own freedom of action: 'As for my part, I have but a few days to be under her tyranny; [...] Severity makes more hypocrites than any sort of discipline,' says one of them.¹¹⁷ In *Irish Hospitality*, Shadwell goes even further in showing that the Whig way is not just a political theory, but a template for right action and a philosophy capable of guiding one through life's moral dilemmas. This is the emergence of what Canfield calls the emergent 'master trope of the bourgeois era, self-reliance'.¹¹⁸ He sees a pattern in plays of the era of success for 'those who stand fixed on the firm centre of self-control as opposed to those who yield to lawless passion,'¹¹⁹ a convergence of public and private morality. Shadwell gives exact expression to this trope in *Irish Hospitality*. Goodlove, who is one of the touchstones of right action in the play, evokes the Whig ideal as the great good, in his attempts to get Charles Worthy to act properly, thereby implying that Whiggery is synonymous with Enlightenment, that it is the proper guiding light to right action even in non-political life - the social or the mercantile. Reason, Moderation and Self-

¹¹⁷ *The Sham Prince*, III. p. 214.

¹¹⁸ Canfield, 'Shifting Tropes of Ideology', p.199.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Discipline, the refusal to be governed by arbitrary monarchs or passions, the ability to stand on one's own moral standards, are the highest pinnacle of human achievement:

GOODLOVE But as our politic notions of the world teach us to hate tyranny and slavery, and to make noble stands for the preserving of our liberty, so we should subdue the arbitrary power of the flesh – there, self preservation should exert itself; 'tis then indeed the first principle of nature, which we ought to make use of, to depose the corrupt monarchy of sin.' ¹²⁰

This Whig moral utopia is invoked, though, not in mercantile Dublin, but in rural Fingall. For this play, *Irish Hospitality; or, Virtue Rewarded*, Shadwell moves out of the city, and for the first time we have Irish country life among the Gentry portrayed on the stage.

Fingall occupies a symbolic space in the Anglo-Irish imagination during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It was a place removed from the centre, where normal standards and activities are skewed, and the usual boundaries become more elastic. Sir Jowler Kennel marks its uniqueness when he claims to have 'the best pack of hounds in Ireland, Fingall, or the County of Wicklow'.¹²¹ *Love and a Bottle* ends in a Fingallion dance, an indication that it is a place where Irish and English cultures intermingle, in direct violation of Poyning's Law. It also marks an aperture by which native Irish culture breaks into the consciousness of the English of Ireland by way of music and dancing. In *The Hasty Wedding*, Irish musicians gather under Sir Ambrose's window with their 'drums, trumpets, fiddlers and bagpipes, all come to wish you joy of your wedding, [...] an impertinent custom, but they have pleaded it time out of mind'.¹²² In *Irish Hospitality*, Fingall is a melting-pot where different patterns of Ascendancy

¹²⁰ *Irish Hospitality*, V. in *Works of Charles Shadwell*, II, p. 286.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, II. p. 234.

¹²² Cash & Sir Ambrose, *The Hasty Wedding* IV. p 79.

attitudes and models of character and behaviour are explored and tested. Shadwell portrays it as a Whig Commonwealth, in which the boundaries of class and race melt and dissolve, and status and advancement are determined by merit, not birth or breeding. Of the series of marriages that end the play, two are inter-class matches, and one is inter-racial.

Many of Shadwell's preoccupations remain intact, but he adds some new ones. In particular he uses the play to explore the place and character of the Ascendancy landlord in the country at large, his influence and responsibilities, the different types of characters that are emerging, and different models for the landed gentry. The ideal is Sir Patrick Worthy, the proprietor of Mount Worthy. He is described in the *Dramatis Personae* as: 'A generous tempered Gentleman, who having a plentiful estate, keeps open house to all comers and goers'.¹²³ His favourite pastimes, when not ministering to the needs of his family and tenants are 'the bliss of contemplation, the conversation of a friend, and that delightful attribute of man, the will and power of doing good'.¹²⁴ He has had the benefit of a liberal education, and has embraced the civilized, enlightened balance of the Augustan age, unlike his younger brother, appropriately called Clumsey, who is a rude countryman, and resists all Sir Patrick's attempts to raise him to a gentle standard of behaviour. 'I was in hopes', says Sir Patrick, 'gentleman-like example, and good company, in time might make him hate his sordid ways'.¹²⁵ But Clumsey is incorrigible and resists all enticements to refinement:

CLUMSEY He's so whimsical as to find fault with my laying my elbows on a table when I'm weary; nay, if I have ever so much meat sticking between my teeth, he will frown on me only for picking 'em with a fork.¹²⁶

¹²³ *Dramatis Personae*, *Irish Hospitality*, I, p. 204.

¹²⁴ Sir Patrick Worthy, *Irish Hospitality*, I. p.215.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 222.

¹²⁶ *Irish Hospitality*, I, p. 209.

Clumsey is a type of rough squire, who only knows country ways and is proud of his bucolic ignorance; to him, the town and its allurements are ridiculous, and Sir Patrick's attempts to gentrify him nothing but a confounded nuisance. He is happy in his epicurean squalor:

CLUMSEY Thank my honest country education [...] Oh, that I could but sit in an elbow-chair after dinner, smoke in the parlour, and sleep there, what a heavenly life I should live. [...] I think everybody's business in this world is to please themselves; and life is short, and generally so troublesome, that there's no study like that of studying to be easy. I would sleep when I'm weary, rise when I'm hungry, smoke for my digestion, drink to raise my spirits, hunt for my health, and never do anything that should give me trouble.¹²⁷

Their neighbour, Sir Jowler Kennel, is the first draft of the rattling, hunting Irish squire, who thinks of nothing but his dogs and horses, whose delight is chasing a fox, and whose every thought and utterance is couched in the language and metaphor of the hunting field. The *Dramatis Personae* describes him as: 'a gay pert country baronet, a true sports man, setting a greater value upon his horses and dogs, than those of his own species'.¹²⁸ In his attempts to woo the two disdainful daughters of Sir Patrick Worthy, he displays a vein of good natured ignorance, which disgusts the girls and allows the narrowness of his mind and life to be satirized:

SIR JOWLER You are a couple of very pretty pussies, and I don't set any value upon my person. Not but I have been taken for a proper lusty man, and have two thousand pounds a year, [...] and I love a true-bred dog, as I love my life, and that's a great sign of good nature, and a good natur'd man will always dote upon a woman. You must know I am in winter a very little trouble in a house, for I am all weathers, wet and dry, upon the back of Primrose. Then as to my eating and drinking, if you put hops enough in my March-beer, and malt in my October, I shall never find fault with your cookery. I hope you're not

¹²⁷ *Irish Hospitality*, I. p. 213.

¹²⁸ *Dramatis Personae*, *Irish Hospitality*, p. 204.

apt to be jealous, for I must own I love my huntsman mainly. Now if you can't sleep with a good many dogs upon the bed, why none but Beauty, Ranger, Cesar and Sweetlips shall lie of my side; and if you have an aversion to smoking, as I know some ladies have, why I'll chaw, 'tis all one to me.

PENELOPE Pray, Sir Jowler, are these your good qualities, or your bad ones? ¹²⁹

This array of landlords is more than just a gallery of portraits: it has a wider dimension, socially, politically, and as a symbol of the relationship with England. Sir Patrick is most definitely a *presentee* landlord, and everything else flows from that. He is not far removed from the moral and economic paternalism recommended by Maria Edgeworth.¹³⁰ Absenteeism is frowned upon from several angles. Looming in the background is the failure of the neighbouring estate of Sir Run-away Spendthrift, whose failure to attend to his estates resulted in ruin:

SIR JOWLER 'Twas my old friend's Sir Run-away Spendthrift's, poor soul; he was nobody's foe but his own. He would spend his time in Dublin when he should be running his dogs, and before the hunting season was half over, he was fool enough to go to Bath for his health, and he no sooner got it, but he went to London and there lost that and his estate too.¹³¹

Clumsey, Sir Patrick's brother, pooh-poohs the idea of a fancy education when the young master should have been learning the ropes around the estate:

CLUMSEY Pshaw, pshaw! What a bed-roll of fluff is here! Instead of sending him to France and Italy, you should have let him ride about with your baily, and look over the steward's accounts; 'twill make him a much prettier Gentleman than your cunnundrum philosociations will do.¹³²

¹²⁹ *Irish Hospitality*, II. p. 234.

¹³⁰ Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent, & Ennui*, ed. by Marilyn Butler (London: Penguin Books, 1992): 'When I saw on Lord Y — 's estate and on those of several other gentlemen [...] the neat cottages, the well-cultivated farms, the air of comfort, industry, and prosperity, diffused through the lower classes of the people, I was convinced that much may be done by the judicious care and assistance of landlords for their tenantry.' p 307.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, II. p. 236.

¹³² *Ibid.*, I. p. 217.

Sir Jowler Kennel leaves his estate only twice a year, when there is nothing to do: he goes to Dublin 'most commonly in Easter term', or 'when the hunting Season's over'.¹³³ He is well aware of the dangers to a naïve countryman when he does so, and of the calamity that has befallen Spendthrift. Sir Patrick, at the end of the play, marries off his son, in a sense to the ancient habitants of the land, in order to root him there and keep him to his work and obligations. But for all their paternalistic presence, what is lacking in the play is any sense of characters embedded in the landscape, (of the sort that Boucicault shows a hundred years later), even though they have been landlords in Fingall 'above these hundred years'.¹³⁴ The consciousness displayed by them is still colonial and exploitative, predicated on what the country can yield rather than any spiritual attachment. They talk of the hunting, rents, lifestyle or charity, all of which are products of the land, but show no attachment to the country itself.

Such sentimental attachment to a place would not be part of Sir Patrick Worthy's philosophy. He is an enlightened and moral gentleman, the quintessence of Philips' 'generous' man, and he is also the epitome of what Canfield sees as the upright bourgeois standing on his own moral judgement. In him bourgeois self-reliance meets aristocratic 'generosity'. In *The Hasty Wedding*, we saw, in the shape of Sir Ambrose Wealthy, the urban bourgeois characters taking the next step up the social ladder: Sir Ambrose was intent on marrying his daughter into the landed gentry. In *Irish Hospitality* we see the process actually taking place. The estate of Sir Run-away Spendthrift has been bought by Sir Would-be Generous. Sir Would-be tries to imitate the generosity and hospitality of Sir Patrick, but he hasn't got the manner and ease of the proper Irish ascendancy gentleman. His heart rebels from such profligacy, and he does it 'with an awkward grace, and for want of a cheerful countenance, his generosity

¹³³ *Ibid.*, I. p. 211.

¹³⁴ Sir Patrick, *Irish Hospitality*, I. p. 223.

hardly seems favours'.¹³⁵ The climax of the play turns on the two meanings of 'generosity'. Sir Would-be thinks that generosity is a physical act that consists of giving away money; Sir Patrick has to show him that it is a much wider and more elusive interweaving of virtue, morals, manners, and good taste. Sir Would-be, in their duel of 'générosité,' is completely overthrown:

SIR WOULD-BE This act of generosity has indeed disarmed me, and you
 have given me convincing proofs that you are the good man I
 ought to be. [...] By your wondrous generosity [you] show me such a
 heap of vices hovering around my soul that it shocks my very nature.
 136

In *Irish Hospitality* Shadwell is beginning to explore the ways in which the Ascendancy are filling the metaphorical, imaginative and spiritual space left by the fall of the Irish Chieftains. Sir Patrick appears as the perfect spiritual and physical embodiment of a landed gentleman. Sir Would-be may have the money to buy the estate but he doesn't have the style – he inhabits the physical space but not the metaphysical. That is still occupied by the former owner, poor Spendthrift, who had the style, and is fondly remembered while Sir Would-be is despised; money, by itself, is not enough. Sir Patrick is rich, landed, open-handed, liberally educated and fitted perfectly to his habitat; he has assumed the easy, graceful '*flaithiúileacht*' of the old Gaelic lords, as the play's title indicates. He occupies the metaphysical space, which Sir Would-be cannot, though he still lacks historical and spiritual continuity. The wedding of his son Charles and Winnifred Dermott will provide that spiritual union of the island races, and in the play *Rotherick O'Connor*, Shadwell will reach for the historical justification as well.

¹³⁵ Morose, *Irish Hospitality*, I. p. 217.

¹³⁶ *Irish Hospitality*, V. p. 293.

Sir Patrick's paternalistic authority can be taken as another Whig metaphor of constitutional monarchy; it is latent rather than intrusive; he does not force his convictions on his subjects, but when needed he swings into action and solves all problems; otherwise he allows his daughters, his brother, his sister, his son, and his tenants, to choose their own ways. When a crisis occurs, however, he intervenes and imposes his own will, for their greater good, and they all willingly comply, like good Lockean/Hobbesean subjects. Otherwise, he contents himself with setting the best example of attitude and behaviour. The political implications are clear enough: he runs his estate for the benefit of his people, not for himself, as England should do for Ireland, or a constitutional monarch for his subjects. The liberty of the citizens is limited only by the common good.

The awareness of Ireland that Shadwell exhibits is remarkably inclusive and meritocratic: anything is possible to those who work for and deserve it. The vision of Sir Patrick Worthy includes not just his immediate, but his extended 'Family.' In *Irish Hospitality*, the notion of family extends to include all servants and tenants on Sir Patrick's, or Sir Jowler's estates, even to the virtuous Irish – those who have embraced civilization and English ways. He shows very strongly the paternalistic colonial outlook: that proper example and regulation will civilize the indigenous inhabitants, and once they have abandoned their old ways and embraced the new, they can and should be assimilated into enlightened society, even, as in the case of the peasant girl Winnifred Dermott, raised to the position of Lady of the Manor. Virtue and Worth, he holds, can be found anywhere, in cabin or mansion, and, as the subtitle asserts, must be encouraged and rewarded wherever it is found. The raising of Winifred Dermott by marriage to the son of the Baronet is the most startling example of this rising in society, but it extends also to the female servants, who end up marrying into a higher stratum. Another inter-

class marriage takes place between Lucy, the maid, and Sir Patrick's brother, Clumsey; who, oddly, protests to her: 'What should you be ashamed of marriage for?'¹³⁷ Although he is her superior socially, Lucy is wary of marrying him, because of his uncouthness. Sir Patrick instantly gives the match his blessing and gives them a house, 'my hunting Seat', to live in.¹³⁸ He explains his assent to the marriage: he agrees with Lucy that she is superior to Clumsey in everything but Birth: 'Rise, Lucy, perhaps thou may'st polish him a little.'¹³⁹ She has taken advantage of the example given by the Big House, Clumsey has not, and as a result, she is more enlightened and civilized than he is. This is contrasted with the men-servants, who are berated for shamming gentility rather than displaying intrinsic merit; they have acquired the manner but not the essence. They are mentioned disdainfully by Sir Ambrose in *The Hasty Wedding*, and Trusty is physically attacked by Clumsey for aping polite manners:

CLUMSEY Here's a dog! Why, Sirrah, this is worse than calling me names. Thou art an incendiary, a complimentary rascal; thou art enough to debauch a whole Family with thy formalities. I'll teach you to be a coxcomb, and pull off your hat and bow, I will, Sirrah.
*Follows him out and beats him.*¹⁴⁰

Clumsey is objecting to the gentrification of the lower class, who, as they become richer, can assume the customs and manners of the upper-classes; this is why he beats Trusty and complains about 'wenches impertinently full of manners'.¹⁴¹ He sees manners as the prerogative of the higher classes, even though he has none himself, and the lower classes have no right to them. What Clumsey is deploring is the inevitable progress of civilization, the spreading of enlightenment out from Dublin into Fingall, which was the great hope and aim of the English colonists, but obviously anathema to Sir Patrick's

¹³⁷ *Irish Hospitality*, V. p. 302.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, V. p. 303.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, V. p. 303.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II. p. 231.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, IV. p. 257.

'stupid brother'.¹⁴² It is a sign of his failure to stop this trend that he himself ends up married to the maid, whose 'breeding' exceeds his own.

The constant harping on appearance and manners in *Irish Hospitality* is a further indication of this rising in society, and the paranoia about sham gentility. Sir Would-be Generous takes Sir Patrick for a servant because of the simplicity of his dress. Sir Patrick dresses up Winnifred in fine clothes and jewels to make her worth apparent to the meanest understanding – his son's. The servant down from the city, Trusty, takes Sir Patrick's brother, Clumsey, for a peasant; Clumsey finds it highly offensive to have a servant who has the manners and appearance of his masters. The motif of the servant aping the gentleman recurs frequently in Shadwell's plays: in *The Intriguing Lovers*, *The Sham Prince*, and *Irish Hospitality*. Apart from being a stock dramatic device, it must also have struck a chord with the audience. Such a 'pert and witty footman' would doubtless please those above in the gallery,¹⁴³ but Shadwell turns the tables on them in *The Hasty Wedding* by having Squire Daudle imitate one of the lower class.

The social pattern in Shadwell's plays is not one of a monolithic and stratified Anglo-Protestant hegemony, but shows instead a society constantly re-forming itself. His view of society and education is fraternal rather than hierarchical, Whiggish rather than Tory: he is for the Commonwealth, not the Aristocracy; education and example are the tools which fashion society. Birth, in this analysis, is relatively unimportant.

SIR PATRICK Besides Charles, you are young, the temptations of the
 world are great, and virtue is not born with us.

CHARLES I hope I shall never do anything that will be contrary to
 that honour you have imprinted in me.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Sir Patrick, *Irish Hospitality*, V. p. 299.

¹⁴³ Epilogue, *Irish Hospitality*, p.203.

¹⁴⁴ *Irish Hospitality*, V. p. 299.

Both agree that virtue and honour are not inborn in us, but are learned by education, in this case by the example of Sir Patrick. Charles' failure to live up to this standard elevates Winnifred over him in Sir Patrick's estimation. The value of virtue (attainable by everyone) over birth, estate or education is expressed in the subtitle, *Virtue Rewarded*. Sir Patrick even offers to marry Winnifred himself, if Charles proves unworthy:

SIR PATRICK I love thee well, thy parentage might be indeed an obstacle to my designs, but thou hast a world of virtue, and of goodness too; my title will make thee a lady, and in return all our children shall inherit thy virtues.¹⁴⁵

What we have here is the worthy Irish native being raised to equal status socially and economically: 'Her virtue is of inestimable value,' asserts Sir Patrick.¹⁴⁶ The only thing against Winnifred is her birth, as an Irish peasant, but her education has been as a companion to Sir Patrick's daughters, a further instance of Sir Patrick's belief in education by example, a successful one this time, unlike Charles or Clumsey. Penelope, Sir Patrick's daughter, tells her: 'I always said you were designed for greater things than e'er your birth foretold.'¹⁴⁷ This democracy or meritocracy that Shadwell espouses is very marked, and he implies that the role of the Gentry is to educate and raise the native Irish by the best example, which they get in this play only from Sir Patrick and Ned Generous; the rest are a very bad example indeed. Shadwell's attitudes are critical of the performance of large sections of the Ascendancy.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, V. p. 300.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, V. p. 302.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, V. p. 302.

By taking advantage of the education and example available, society and persons within it move upwards, but underlying both is the requisite of 'virtue'. Virtue is an idea that harks back to ancient Rome, and is a slippery enough concept; it is not simple 'goodness', as Sir Patrick showed when he said to Winnifred: 'Thou hast a world of virtue, and of goodness too.'¹⁴⁸ It rather combines the idea of correct judgement leading to right action and the strength (*virtus*) to see it through in the face of opposition; it is a sort of portmanteau word which holds the meaning of bourgeois self-reliance and individual action based on personal conviction. Education and example can also corrupt, if virtue is not present in the learner, as in the cases of Charles and Trusty.

Example is seen as a more potent educator than Oxford: for some things a man needs to go there. It has, says Sir Patrick:

given him a knowledge of the world as well as books. He has Law enough to secure his title to his estate, Divinity enough to justify his religion, and Physic enough not to have him thought a fool; and with these accomplishments, I shall think him well worthy of inheriting my estate.¹⁴⁹

But Charles also imbibed bad influences while away. He is, according to the *Dramatis Personae*, 'notwithstanding his liberal education and his father's good example, a vicious young fellow'.¹⁵⁰ Sir Patrick is convinced that the best example at home is preferable, and it is vital for the Ascendancy to provide the proper example. He moves therefore to counteract the pernicious foreign influences that have impressed his son Charles and elects to keep him at home where he will have him under his watchful eye, and married to a woman who is a pattern of virtue.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, V. p. 300.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I. p. 217.

¹⁵⁰ *Shadwell's Works*, p. 204.

Appearance and manners can fail to indicate the quality and worth of a person, but action is the sure guide to virtue, and virtue is the currency of Worth. Virtue takes advantage of education and example, and this leads to the right people rising in society, and in Shadwell's plays, these are always the women.

The appearance of actresses on the stage after the Restoration provided recognizable role models for women as well as giving them a public voice for the first time. There was, for the most part, an unbridgeable gap between the women on the stage and those in the audience; Peg Woffington, for example, presided over the club that Thomas Sheridan formed for the grandees of Dublin Castle in the mid-seventeenth century, but, as his daughter wrote: 'Mr. Sheridan found it impossible[...] to introduce her to his wife.'¹⁵¹ The playwrights, however, although mostly men, were not slow to use these characters to articulate female concerns. These, almost invariably, revolve around issues of dependence and independence, stretched between the two poles of money and matrimony. Farquhar takes a good look at the desirability of divorce for a woman in *The Beaux' Stratagem*; the girls in *St. Stephen's Green* consider how to balance the generous against the mercenary in achieving an equitable and sensible marriage; Shadwell goes beyond this and gives an extended and consistent expression to the female viewpoint in all of his plays.

The young women in Shadwell's plays are penned in economic cages, but there are strong indications of a change in their readiness to tolerate it, in Aurelia in *The Hasty Wedding*, the young Homebreds, or especially Araminta in *The Sham Prince*. It is in these that we see the rebellion most obviously taking place, but it stretches across all classes, down to the servants. The men and the older women want them to stay in their

¹⁵¹ Morash, p. 60.

subservient place, but the mobility of society is invested in the women. It is they who refuse to conform to the expectations of male society. Sir Patrick Worthy's daughters are determined not to be matched with the sporting Sir Jowler Kennel, who evaluates them as if they were two horses: 'Let me see (*looking at Myra*), there's about fifteen hands high, (*looking at Penelope*) and there's about fourteen and a half; they are both full chested, close ribbed, and carry their heads well.'¹⁵² The girls, however, are going to 'pluck up the true spirit of our sex, keep the balance of power even, and then no husband dare use us ill'.¹⁵³ They have no intention of settling for the bucolic squalor so beloved by Clumsey and Sir Jowler: 'Oh, the happy state of living in a sty,' Penelope observes sarcastically, 'where one may grunt and wallow out one's days, eat one's swill without ceremony, and live the life of that charming creature, a hog.'¹⁵⁴ The Homebred girls, in *The Sham Prince*, are bred to housewifery, but won't settle for that, and Araminta castigates their mother for so narrow an attitude:

LADY HOMEBRED I will send 'em out of my hands good housewives; they make all their own bed-linen, Cousin, and Molly has a bed of her own working, and Nanny is working an elbow-chair, and two stools in Irish stitch, which will be finished by this time twelve month; and then shall go about a bed for herself.

ARAMINTA Pretty qualification truly! Can either of 'em do more than a seamstress, or my maid that I give five pound a year to. I warrant you they can make fish sauce, and an orange pudding; so can every greasy cook-maid. You breed 'em as if they were decayed gentlewomen, and that you had hopes of recommending 'em to be housekeepers in a great family, where they are to keep an unruly set of servants in awe.¹⁵⁵

The heroine, Celia, in *The Plotting Lovers*, will be a nun before she marries the booby her father has chosen for her: 'I will go beyond the sea, change my religion, and throw myself into a nunnery,' she threatens.¹⁵⁶ Aurelia, in *The Hasty Wedding*, refuses to bow

¹⁵² *Irish Hospitality*, I. p. 233.

¹⁵³ Penelope, *Irish Hospitality*, I. p. 232.

¹⁵⁴ *Irish Hospitality*, II. p.256.

¹⁵⁵ *The Sham Prince*, I. p. 174.

¹⁵⁶ *The Plotting Lovers*, in *Shadwell's Works*, II, p. 311.

to her father's will even though she will lose everything by it. All these are exemplars of a rising independence of mind, and a refusal to accede to the commodification of women in the marriage market that Shadwell constantly questions. It culminates in the character of Araminta in *The Sham Prince* who speaks and acts as freely as any man, because of her economic independence. The world of men seems static by comparison. The rising generation of women is clearly different from what went before, all to some degree, and some to an extreme degree. It is they who carry the changes upward into the stagnant male world. A thread that runs through a lot of Irish plays is the motif of the independent-minded Irish female aristocrat, already emerging here as 'your fine, gay, sprightly Irish Women'.¹⁵⁷ The women are more practical than the men, who frequently behave idiotically, and they are the engines of social change. They do not suffer fools gladly, and it is the females, influencing their men to fortitude or flexibility, as necessary, who are moving into position to control Anglo-Irish society from the background.

The women of William Philips' *St. Stephen's Green* are not nationalised at all, but in Shadwell we can see the lineaments of the Anglo-Irish female fairly clearly in its early form. The girls in Philips' play were sparkling but dutiful, Shadwell's are far more independent. They have a surprising amount of personal freedom – where is Sir Homebred? Who is nominally in charge of Araminta? Nobody seems to be; she is perfectly independent to do as she pleases. Even the two young Homebred girls, who are closely watched by their mother, are still able to elude her watchful eye. Lady Homebred's view of a good wife is a perfectly bourgeois one, and is berated as such by Araminta. Lady Homebred is not at ease in society, in spite of her title,¹⁵⁸ and she can't

¹⁵⁷ Trip, *The Sham Prince*, IV. p. 235.

¹⁵⁸ Sir Ambrose, in *The Hasty Wedding*, comments on the ease by which some unsuitable people achieve a title; he despises Squire Daudle as 'a fellow of yesterday, whose impertinent mother sets up for Quality, because a Lord Lieutenant, in a merry mood, knighted her husband'; in *Shadwell's Works*, I, p 44.

drop her parsimonious habits. Her girls, on the other hand, have no intention of accepting her standards and step out for aristocratic freedom; they are Ascendants in the making. Araminta, all through, shows a truly aristocratic contempt for others' opinions, but Lady Homebred says it's because her fortune sets her above the opinion of the town—a mercenary but shrewd enough observation, and one that Farquhar would endorse. But it does not set young Miss Sevelle the merchant's daughter, whose fortune is only potential, above the town's opinion: her lack of aristocratic credentials renders her vulnerable to gossip. Her *expectation* of fortune and status makes her a valuable but fragile commodity, but a breath of scandal and her value will plummet, in contrast to Araminta whose established genteel value is beyond the reach of scandal. Araminta's economic independence gives her the freedom to behave and talk like a man in public. She reserves her softer side for her private life: 'Prithee, none of your Fustian for me; if we are to play the Fool, let it be in private; keep your soft things to say to me then,' she instructs her suitor.¹⁵⁹

In all of this Shadwell predates Marxist theory on the economic basis of society, that society is economic man, or woman, in action, and that all social activity is based on economics, and all economic activity, he shows us, following Hobbes, is based on trust. His plays explore the uses and abuses of trust, and how it spirals up and down the social and business network. The Sham Prince is abusing the trust that is the basis of society, so Trueman and Welldon turn his abuse back on him; Lady Homebred doesn't trust her daughters, so they pay her back by going behind her back. Sir Ambrose Wealthy's refusal to trust his daughter leads him into all sorts of foolishness and grief. Winnifred Dermott and her family, on the other hand, honour the social contract they have entered

¹⁵⁹ *The Sham Prince*, V. p. 259.

into with Sir Patrick Worthy, and are rewarded with an estate and high position for their daughter.

Shadwell's comedies show us a bourgeois world, from which the nobility is absent or invisible, and Whiggery reigns supreme. Socially, it is a mutable society and change is invested in its women; they are its agents and subjects. Shadwell gives us emerging types of male and female Ascendancy, and in *Irish Hospitality* he recommends the best practice for managing the country that is based on Lockean ideas of inclusion and meritocracy, reaching out to, and including, the native Irish. This play has a utopian agenda, and it is impossible to say exactly how much of Shadwell's dramatized society is aspirational, and how much is a portrait drawn from life – probably a mixture of both. Helen M. Burke sees his portrayal of a benevolent landlord class and contented tenantry as propaganda for the Executive and against the rise of Protestant nationalism:

It was mainly the defenders of the English interest in Ireland who sought to minimize the gravity of the economic condition of Ireland, while those on the Irish patriot side increasingly voiced their concern about the evils of absentee landlords and the dire suffering of the rural and urban poor.¹⁶⁰

Burke's claim is rather undermined by the fact that Shadwell dedicated his published plays to one of the Butlers while the current Duke of Ormond was in disgrace and exile for opposing the new Hanoverian dynasty. Nor is it borne out by the characters in his plays: all the English characters are either villains or fools, and the plays chart the valences within Irish society rather than its subjection to outside influences. The only English character who is not an imposter is Squire Trelooby in *The Dismal Squire*, and his extreme Cornish naiveté cannot be construed as an image of English political or economic dominance. There is also running through the plays a vein of trenchant

¹⁶⁰ Helen M. Burke, *Riotous Performances*, p. 69.

criticism of Anglophilia and those who despise Ireland and its people. Sevelle, in *The Sham Prince* tells Cheatly: 'For the honour of our country, appear as grand as you can, and let those Germans see that we of Ireland are no despicable people.'¹⁶¹ The colonial preference for English produce over Irish is given similar treatment in this passage from *The Hasty Wedding* between Lettice the Maid and Squire Daudle:

SQUIRE DAUDLE	You must know all my rarities are right English.
LETTICE	Oh, dear, English; I am mighty fond of English things; I will tell my Lady to see all your English things.
SQUIRE DAUDLE	Here's a Jade now. It is not above two years ago since she was taken out of an Irish cabin, with her brogues on, and yet begins to despise her own country, and is fond of everything that's English. I will turn her away for that, the moment I marry Aurelia; I think we have enemies enough abroad, without encouraging those within ourselves. [...] She that would betray her own country would no doubt betray me. ¹⁶²

This disapproving attitude towards those who prefer English ways and produce is exactly that demonstrated by William Philips in *St. Stephen's Green*, and cannot be seen as anything other than an increasing identification between the class and the country. *Irish Hospitality* can be seen as a pattern for an enlightened Ascendancy that attempts to bind the different strands and races together under a benign and moderate authority.

In this, Shadwell goes well beyond the creed of Protestant or colonial nationalism, whose concern was for the maintenance of its own supremacy, in spite of repeated urgings to inclusivity from various playwrights. Sir Patrick, in his role as enlightened, moral authority, imposes this union for the common good, and unites the two strands of the Irish race. Sir Patrick's son, Charles, has tried to force Winnifred into submission, but has been prevented by his father's intervention, and instead of being a 'wronged maid', she becomes a virtuous wife. The metaphoric and physical spaces merge, and a

¹⁶¹ *The Sham Prince*, II. p. 193.

¹⁶² *The Hasty Wedding*, II. p. 57

new ruling class is forged, to which the entire population can give allegiance, and which controls the present and the future.

The past, however, is trickier to control. Legitimacy was a growing concern of the Anglo-Irish, and, as they drifted away from England, it was becoming increasingly necessary for them to recreate Irish history in their own image. In *Rotherick O'Connor*, Shadwell continues the work of Shirley in appropriating Irish history, in treating the Irish past as a metaphorical and imaginative space that can be colonised like a physical one.

Chapter V

Cultural Colonisation:

Summoning 'Hibernia'

Shadwell's *Rotherick O'Connor*; Philips' *Hibernia Freed*; Dobbs' *The Patriot Chief*; Howard's *The Siege of Tamor*; Ashton's *The Battle of Aughrim*

The Ascendancy in the early decades of the eighteenth century is no longer the apparent monolith it was. Different groups, classes, and interests intertwine in a much richer tapestry than was apparent in the seventeenth century, and the balance has shifted decidedly in favour of the gentry and away from the nobility. None of these groups is static, however; one of the most striking things about the eighteenth century Irish Ascendancy is its fluctuating character.

The native Irish aristocracy, who seemed to have almost died out after Aughrim, made its presence felt again as the eighteenth century progressed. The Penal Laws were largely what would be called in modern terms 'social engineering.' They were used mainly as a means of excluding Catholics, who were regarded as being under the command of their clergy and the Popes of Rome, from the levers of land, power, and the constitution, where they could not be trusted to protect the liberty that the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1689 had bestowed on them as subjects of the English king. Even the first Earl of Charlemont, in the late eighteenth century, while abhorring the Penal Laws, still held the view that 'he did not think it safe to grant liberty to those who did not believe in liberty themselves'.¹

Corkery, in *The Hidden Ireland*, asserts that the surviving Gaelic aristocracy which clung to Catholicism cultivated invisibility during the eighteenth century and became beacons for the Gaelic culture and people of 'the Hidden Ireland'. But Corkery tells only half the story; his bias always shows him the total rupture of the connection between the

¹ Maurice James Craig, *The Volunteer Earl: Being the Life and Times of James Caulfeild First Earl of Charlemont* (London: The Cresset Press, 1948), p. 188.

upper-class English and the lower-class Irish. His overriding image is of a vigorous underground Gaelic culture that continued to thrive beyond the ignorant ken of the Protestant English Ascendancy. What Corkery ignores is that there was a minority of Irish aristocracy that held on to some or all of its holdings without embracing the Established Church or hiding like the O'Connells of Derrynane – the Earls of Antrim (McDonnells), and the Viscounts Kenmare (Brownes), for example. Both of them bestrode the two cultures. 'Irish Ireland', writes Corkery, 'had, by the eighteenth century, become purely a peasant nation.'² This is not so. Apart from the McDonnells or the Brownes, the activities of the exiled Irish nobility on the Continent – 'an Irish Catholic nation in waiting', as Whelan calls them, 'with its colleges, its army, its wealthy diaspora'³ – continued to be followed with avid interest in their place of origin; the Gaelic poetry of the period shows considerably more interest in France and Spain than in Dublin or London. Neither does Corkery take into account the position and influence of the newly-risen bourgeoisie, many of whom were Catholic and belonging to the remnants of the dispossessed families – middlemen like O'Dogherty in Macklin's *The True-born Irishman*. More importantly, those who converted to the Established Church still retained the loyalty and regard of the buried mass of Catholics.

Those who did convert did not automatically give up the Irish language or abandon their former aristocratic positions within Irish culture; the conversion was often viewed as a necessary ruse by the family followers, though arousing deep suspicion among the more recently arrived English of Ireland. The established English or Irish aristocracy,

² Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1925), p. 8.

³ Kevin Whelan, 'An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 10, (1995), 7- 23 (p. 8).

however, tended to look benignly on such dynastic manoeuvres. The last Earl of Thomond, (to whom William Philips dedicated *Hibernia Freed*), was given permission by George I to ask his Catholic cousin, Viscount Clare, then serving in the French army, to convert to Protestantism and inherit the title.⁴ The aristocracy understood the urge to preserve and consolidate family property and prestige, regardless of religious or political rifts.

The lower classes of the Protestant Anglo-Irish regarded the practice of timely conversion with a more jaundiced eye. Helen M. Burke quotes from *The Conduct of the Purse in Ireland*, a pamphlet of 1714:

“They frequently after their Conversion retain their former intimacy with the Papists, and are as well and as cordially received by them as ever. They never make or endeavour to make any new Acquaintance or Alliance with the old Protestants; they rejoice with the Papists, and when they are cast down, it is so with them also; good and bad News affect them and the Papists in the very same manner. And in a word, excepting that they sometimes go to Church, they remain in all respects to all appearances the very same men they were before their conversion.”⁵

Such sniping continued all through the eighteenth century, as the Catholic majority found ways around and through the Penal Laws.

The concern for legal and spiritual legitimacy that the Protestant Irish felt is explored, bolstered and questioned in a series of historical plays during the eighteenth century. At the root of all these plays lies Molyneux’s triple argument: that Ireland was never conquered because the Norman-English arrived by invitation and were paid for their

⁴ Wheatley, *Beneath Ierne’s Banners: Irish Protestant Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), p. 52.

⁵ Helen M. Burke, *Riotous Performances: The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theatre, 1712-1784* (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p.131.

assistance by grants of land, that the voluntary submission of the Irish chieftains to Henry II gave them equal rights to their counterparts in England, and that the willing assistance given by the colonists to the authorities in subjugating the rebellious Irish, all gave the English of Ireland a legitimacy and a right to constitutional freedom under the Crown as good as that enjoyed by any English citizen. The plays, however, betray the depth and range of their uncertainty about the nature, status, and legitimacy of their tenure. The playwrights also go beyond the position expressed by Molyneux and Swift, by questioning the dismissal of the native Irish as non-entities, and by suggesting a rapprochement, as is seen in Shadwell, Dobbs and Philips. In hindsight, the playwrights can be seen to be wiser than the Establishment politicians, who pursued Protestant hegemony rather than the inclusiveness recommended by the plays, and who remained suspicious even of the converted Irish. The majority of them chose to live the illusion of the Protestant Nation, sealed off from the underclass, untouched and untouchable.

Several plays that survive from the early eighteenth century examine the legitimacy question in a historical context. In doing so, they create a story and fashion a myth, rather than a history, for the English of Ireland, if they would choose to believe it. Every society needs a founding-myth, the story it tells to itself, the illusion that sustains it. The founding myth of the Anglo-Irish was the taming of a savage country and bringing to it civility and laws, but this myth was crumbling visibly, and what we have in these historical plays is the creation of a new one to feed and nourish the colonists' imagination, a new story, the Story of 'Hibernia.'

The distance and tension between the story and the event has always exercised writers – how do the Facts become the Story? A story that is believed achieves a more potent actuality than a mere list of occurrences; art and language give it shape and meaning. In these plays events are moulded into a new shape and meaning for the Anglo-Irish ruling class. Aristotle writes in *The Poetics* that it is not enough for a story to be true, it must be credible; factual accuracy is less important than narrative shape and internal coherence: if the story is believed, it is truth for the believer, regardless of its relationship with the facts. From James Shirley on, Irish playwrights have been incorrigible myth-makers. Events are transformed by language into Story, which then assumes its own transformational reality; but belief is essential: only those who can embrace the fullness and reality of the Story, as opposed to the reality of the Event, can experience the renovative magic that it dispenses. This probably finds its finest expression in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, where 'there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed,'⁶ and only those who believe the Word are saved – Pegeen Mike can't, Old Mahon can. Pegeen Mike pulls back from the Story and demands that raw, bald reality be ultimate; Old Mahon cheerfully accepts the reality of the poetic creation that is the new Christy and together father and son escape from the stultifying diurnality of the shebeen. Pegeen Mike rejects the primary reality of the imagination. The Anglo-Irish in the eighteenth century failed to respond to the imaginative leap that the playwrights made in the creation of an inclusive society, and clung to what seemed to them the reality of the Irish Protestant Nation, one of racial and religious superiority and their God-given right to civilize and rule the country. This was

⁶ JM Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, ed. by Ann Saddlemyer, Synge Collected Works (Oxford: University Press, 1968, & London: Colin Smythe, 1984), p. ??.

in fact just a different, exclusive vision. The speech that Lord Clare made to the Irish Parliament on the Union in 1800 reminds them of what they have chosen to ignore or forget: that their position is based on force and confiscation; if Ireland is the stage on which they perform, the audience is not friendly:

No inconsiderable portion of this island has been confiscated twice or perhaps thrice in the course of a century.[...] What, then, was the situation of Ireland at the revolution? and what is it at this day? The whole power and property of the country has been conferred by successive monarchs of England upon an English colony, composed of three sets of English adventurers, who poured into this country at the termination of three successive rebellions. Confiscation is their common title, and from their first settlement they have been hemmed in on every side by the old inhabitants of the island, brooding over their discontents in sullen indignation.⁷

This speech Elizabeth Bowen describes as ‘a speech of superb detestable realism. On the Anglo-Irish illusion, each phrase of Fitzgibbon fell like a hammer,’⁸ It also indicates how far the aspirations of the playwrights were out of step with the accepted orthodoxy of Ascendancy society.

Shadwell’s *Rotherick O’Connor* (1720) was the first attempt since Shirley’s *St. Patrick for Ireland* in 1640 at fashioning a new Story for the Anglo-Irish by mining Irish history as a source. Like that play it is more concerned with contemporary resonance than historical accuracy. It is the past selected and interpreted to justify the present – the present encoded in a historical metaphor.

⁷ Elliot Fitzgibbon, *Earl of Clare: Mainspring of the Union* (London: The Research Publishing Company, 1960), p. 78.

⁸ *Bowen’s Court*, p. 220.

Rotherick O'Connor is Shadwell's *Tamerlane*; the Whig-Tory opposition of tyranny versus freedom is made perfectly explicit in the Prologue and the play itself:

He brings to view, five hundred years ago
 Heroes nurs'd up in Slaughter, Blood and Woe.
 Kings that governed with an Arbitrary Sway,
 and slavish Subjects, born but to obey.
 [...]
 Learn then from those unhappy days of yore
 to scorn and hate an Arbitrary Power,
 To praise and love those laws that make you Free,
 And are the great Bullworks of your Liberty.⁹

In an interesting reversal of Nationalist history, it comes as something of a shock to find a play in which MacMorrough, the man who brought over the Normans, is the hero and Rotherick O'Connor, who fought to keep them out, is a villain, an absolute monarch who acts on impulse, indulges all his whims, and treats his subjects as slaves:

ROTHERICK A monarch's made to rule each petty slave,
 To bid him live, or send him to his grave.
 Mercy is for a vile, mechanic soul.
 No human passions should a king control.
 'Tis Justice is the rule that guides his way,
 And all is just and good that monarch's say.¹⁰

Rotherick O'Connor is an extreme, arbitrary tyrant, without moral scruple or regard for the rights of others. The character, to a modern sensibility, is written with the crudity of a pantomime villain, without light or shade; unscrupulous and immoral in both private and public spheres.

⁹ 'Prologue written by Mr. Shadwell', 11 & 21, in Christopher Wheatley & Kevin Donovan, eds., *Irish Plays of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, 2 vols (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2003), I, p.169.

¹⁰ *Rotherick O'Connor*, II. in *Shadwell's Works*, I, p. 283.

Contrasted with him are Dermond¹¹ MacMorrough and Strongbow, who are the champions of liberty and law, the representatives of Whig consensus opposed to absolute monarchy. MacMorrough is shown as weak and elderly, the wronged and rightful king, querulous and conciliatory, fretting about his son and daughter. He is an insubstantial figure beside the vigour and passion of Strongbow, but also a necessary brake on Strongbow's bloodthirsty nature; between the two of them they form the Whig ideal of consensus backed by power. The portrayal of Strongbow, the seminal figure for the English colonists, is by no means idealized: he needs the restraint and statesmanship of MacMorrough and his council, and he is kept as a suppliant, in spite of his martial success, by the steadfast refusal of Dermond's daughter, Eva, to legitimize his claim to the throne by becoming his wife.

In *Irish Hospitality* Shadwell adopted the Gaelic convention of portraying Ireland as a female: the character of Winnifred, the peasant girl, extends by implication in that play to represent the subservient majority of the Irish people; the *Aisling* poetry has found its way into his consciousness, as it did into even so hostile a receptacle as Swift, influencing him to produce his satire of the relationships between the British nations in *The Story of the Injured Lady*, casting Ireland as the used and discarded mistress. Mercier considers that the knowledge of Irish was more widespread among the Anglo-Irish of Swift's Dublin than is supposed. Narcissus Marsh, Provost of Trinity, employed a Catholic priest to lecture on the language in the College; about eighty people attended, including the Provost himself, and made considerable progress in the language.¹² In the

¹¹ Instead of Dermot, Dermod or Diarmaid, Shadwell opts to call him Dermond, which appears to be a conflation of Ormond and Desmond, but is topographically meaningless.

¹² Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition*, p.191.

character of Eva in *Rotherick O'Connor* Shadwell takes a further step in creating a female representation of the country, an image that is to have a long life. In the play, Eva gives expression to the Irish point of view at all times; she invokes the Irish virtues, and rebukes any intimations of inferiority:

EVA Regan, your zeal for strangers knows no bounds;
 You have forgot you were in Ireland born,
 Where pure religion, by St. Patrick taught,
 Is still kept up, with a becoming zeal;
 Here we are governed by Nature's dictates,
 Not by dissembling art, which teaches men
 To act quite opposite to what they think;
 Wisdom makes hypocrites, nature makes none.
 Perhaps with artful engines made for war,
 These strangers may strike terror through the field,
 And so affright my father's rebel subjects,
 Who, conscious of the injuries they have done,
 No doubt in dread of him, will fly before them,
 But when the Hibernian spirit's roused,
 These strangers will not be such mighty men. ¹³

As the daughter of MacMorrough, she is equated with his kingdom, and is the repayment to Strongbow for his services; the one cannot be separated from the other; she is the reward, the kingdom is her dowry:

DERMOND Eva, come here, and let me join your hands
 Where I'm sure with joy you'll join your heart;
 Take her my faithful friend and ally,
 And with her, take my crown, and take my kingdom. ¹⁴

As the play progresses so does this identification of Eva with the country, and further elements from the *Aisling* creep in – she is the sorrowing female who cannot think of

¹³ *Rotherick O'Connor*, I. 1. 70.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, V. 1. 20.

love or marriage while the country is in a state of unrest, whose grief is both personal and political:

EVA I have a soul that would not sell
 The barren part of all my land to be
 Revenged on millions of my enemies. ¹⁵

EVA But, horror to my soul, what grief is that,
 To wed the creature whom my country hates. ¹⁶

Throughout the play the military success of the Normans is balanced against Eva's attitude to them. She begins in outright opposition and disgust at her father's actions in inviting them, and outrage at being gifted in marriage to Strongbow. She moves then from firm refusal to grudging acceptance of him as regent in her father's place:

STRONGBOW Suppose it were tonight, what hinders it?
 EVA What may hinder it an age, my consent;
 Know you not that it is necessary? ¹⁷

But by the end of the play, she says:

EVA The Earl of Chepstow comes to set me free,
 And he is now the only friend I've left. ¹⁸

Although O'Connor has been overthrown and the Normans triumphant, she still withholds her consent to uniting herself in marriage to Strongbow. The resonance with the contemporary scene in 1720 is obvious: the country may be subjugated, but it does not willingly accept it, and still withholds its consent.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, III. 1. 229.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 1. 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, V. 1. 103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, V. 1. 396.

The central founding myth of the Anglo-Irish was no longer tenable; the image of civilizing the Irish barbarians had been shattered. A knowledge and understanding of Irish history and culture had spread among the colonists, and Shadwell, in this play, begins the appropriation of this Irish legacy. The Irish are shown to display admirable qualities. They possess courage and loyalty: 'We act what men dare do,' declares Regan, 'and always justify what we think right.'¹⁹ They are fiercely loyal to their country, but not to any particular monarch or authority. They are spontaneous rather than calculating: 'We are governed by Nature's dictates/ Not by dissembling Art which teaches men/ To act quite opposite to what they think.'²⁰

For his main argument, Shadwell revisits Molyneux and, as we have grown to expect from Shadwell, interprets the events of the Norman incursion from a commercial perspective. Locke's doctrine of the contractual nature of the political and social system shows itself here again, but with a particular Shadwellian twist: the exchange between MacMorrough and Strongbow is portrayed as a contract in the business sense. As ever in Shadwell, the play is loaded with commercial metaphor of 'interest', 'credit', 'obligation', and especially the principal conceit of Contract, overriding even familial loyalty and affection:

STRONGBOW	But why this mighty care to save your son? Is it consistent with the agreement made? How can you fulfil your sacred contract? [...]
	Perhaps you do repent you of the bargain made? ²¹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I.1. 74.

²¹ *Ibid.*, II. 1. 17 & 23.

The counter to this contractual insistence in the play is Strongbow's assertion of 'conquest' – 'The right of conquest is the right I own'²² – but this is effectively negated by its context. Helen M. Burke says that this claim of Strongbow's is the ultimate statement to which the play reaches:

Like *Irish Hospitality* however, this play admits a patriot line of argument only to more effectively discredit it, and it does this by suggesting that in the last analysis the Anglo-Normans achieved their power in Ireland through war and conquest rather than "Compact."²³

But an examination of the context shows a different story.

Strongbow's statement of 'conquest' is so qualified by context as to be reversed. He suggests it to Catholicus, the bishop of Tuam, in private, as the way the Norman incursion is to be sold to the native Irish, the 'spin' it is to be given:

CATHOLICUS	The clergy in their pulpits shall declare That you have all the right you would have; We'll found it on what principle you please.
STRONGBOW	The right of conquest is the right I own.
CATHOLICUS	Then they shall preach up that, and in such terms That were you beaten, they should say you conquered. ²⁴

Strongbow's statement is devalued by Catholicus's enthusiastic embrace of it; he transforms it into party propaganda, regardless of its veracity. Catholicus is a Machiavellian churchman, continuously manoeuvring to achieve the best possible

²² *Ibid.*, V. 1. 210.

²³ Burke, *Riotous Performances*, p.73.

²⁴ *Rotherick O'Connor*, V. 1. 207.

position for himself and his church. He blows in the wind like a weathercock, and he is willing to confer legitimacy on anyone who has power. He moves from being a lackey of Rotherick O'Connor's to being a vassal of Strongbow's without a scruple. He schemes and contrives in the background without any moral stability, and his embracing of Strongbow's statement immediately annihilates it, while everything else in the play acts to contradict it. Any conquering Strongbow does is as an employee of Dermond's:

REGAN My royal master, willing to recover
 Rebellious subjects to their true allegiance,
 Hired this noisy lord, and all his knights,
 To serve him in the war, and they assume
 A power, a command, as if they conquered,
 And we and all the country were their slaves.²⁵

Note Regan's 'as if they conquered', saying quite clearly that they did not. The Irish characters refer to the bargain or contract between Strongbow and Dermond with dismay, but have no doubt as to its nature or validity – a transaction in which Strongbow will be rewarded for services rendered.

If 'conquest' is the accepted story, it confers no legitimacy, as it is obvious that a stronger military force has as good a right to overthrow it. So it becomes necessary to put in place a legal and historical justification for the English takeover. This is why Shadwell casts the Norman incursion as a commercial transaction, to be executed and paid for, and legitimate because, to the risen bourgeoisie of the new Ascendancy, such a contract, as Strongbow observed, is 'sacred'.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, V. 1. 307.

But both parties need to be satisfied as to the validity and fairness of the agreement; Strongbow has overcome Dermond's enemies, but he cannot rule without the consent of Eva/Ireland, which has not materialized by the play's end. After MacMorrough's death, Strongbow acknowledges the primacy of Eva, as queen of Leinster, not of his own claims to rule:

STRONGBOW Guards, secure the princess, and if I should die,
 Proclaim her Queen of Leinster, and obey her:
 It is with joy, my fairest, I proceed,
 to vindicate your right ²⁶

With Dermond's death, she inherits both the kingdom and the contract. He fights then to restore Dermond's line to the throne of Leinster, to prove Eva's right to be Queen, not his to be king. The role he seeks will be as her consort, and she, bowing to the inevitable, appoints him, in the interim, as regent:

EVA I beg you would command my father's army,
 Rule and govern well his kingdom, curb his foes,
 And give his poor and wretched subjects ease. ²⁷

The play is consistent with Shadwell's Whig philosophy, and echoes Shirley's *St. Patrick for Ireland*. Shirley showed the Irish as worshippers of false gods, from which the English and St. Patrick rescued them; Shadwell shows them as worshippers of false politics, having despotic, tyrannous kings and priests from whom the Normans delivered them to liberty and justice. Strongbow summarizes his gifts to the Irish:

STRONGBOW I come not to destroy but give you liberty
 And bring this barbarous nation to such laws

²⁶ *Ibid.*, V. 1. 412.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, V. 1. 440.

As will draw peace and plenty to your country.²⁸

But by 1720, such sentiments were becoming unsustainable. Medieval Irish civilization could no longer be characterized as barbarous. Sarah Butler had published her collection of *Irish Tales* in 1716, the first example of Anglo-Irish fiction, drawing on the manuscript of O'Connor's translation of Seathrún Cheitinn's *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn*, which was itself published in 1723.²⁹ She calls her Preface to that work 'On the Learning and Politeness of the Ancient Irish', and instead of praising the role of the colonists in civilizing the savage Irish, she openly blames them for the present barbarous state of the native inhabitants:

Although they may seem [so Rude and Illiterate a People], in the Circumstances they lie under (having borne the heavy yoke of Bondage for so many Years, and have been Cow'd down in their Spirits) yet that once Ireland was esteem'd one of the Principle Nations in Europe for Piety and Learning.³⁰

Strongbow's assertion of 'liberty and laws' gives the opposite side of that argument – the colonial creed of the English of Ireland. Shadwell embraces both points of view and suggests a joint venture between the two races that share the island, and his plot and characterisation pursue this conclusion. Rotherick O'Connor is a reprehensible tyrant, but Strongbow is not much better, being fierce and bloodthirsty, and the play shows his force and power being tamed, harnessed, and directed, first by Dermond MacMorrough and his Council, and later by his need to win the support and esteem of Dermond's

²⁸ *Ibid.*, V. 1. 200.

²⁹ 'Sarah Butler', <http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/b/Butler.Sarah/life.htm> [accessed 9 August 2004] (p. 1 of 2).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, (p. 1 of 2). Sarah Butler acknowledges other sources for her tales in her introduction, among them O'Flaherty's translation of Keating, and works of the Jesuit priest, Peter Walsh.

daughter, which he achieves by becoming her personal champion. *Rotherick O'Connor* rewrites history, or rather re-orientates it from the Anglo-Irish point of view to emphasize the legitimacy of their claims and titles. It follows then that all the Old English are valid and legitimate stakeholders in the country. Historical plays are never about the past; they are historical metaphors for the present; the problem is how to interpret the metaphor. *Rotherick O'Connor* ends with all the Irish chieftains dead and Eva reluctantly acquiescent. Strongbow alone stands as the institutor of the new dispensation – the father of ‘Hibernia’, but Eva still has to be convinced to be its mother. The message is that the Normans/English will rule, bringing ‘peace and prosperity’, the native Irish need to acquiesce for their own good, but that the Norman/English cannot succeed without winning their consent.

Shadwell’s use of bourgeois values and his insistence on the Anglo-Irish right of tenure and the pre-eminence of Whig values is perfectly consistent with his other plays. It would be reasonable to expect that his portrayal of a ‘bourgeois gentry’ and his appropriation of history on their behalf would be greeted with enthusiasm by his audience, but the secondary theme of native Irish consent and the need to find a form of productive sharing of the island must have cancelled that out. The play was not well-received.

Shadwell’s earlier comedies, while no masterpieces, were competent dramas and had been reasonably successful. They are solidly constructed and written, with some flashes of clever plotting and verbal felicity. The characters are conventional humour-based

types, but display some excellent comic quirks: the bucolic spleen of Sir Patrick's brother Clumsey in *Irish Hospitality*, for example, or the gleeful berating of his betters by the disguised servant, Trip, in *The Sham Prince*, are well written and constructed, and dramatically apposite. Shadwell also used those plays to draw some startling conclusions and to air some controversial ideas in public, about the position of women, for instance, or the necessity of absorbing the native Irish into the social and political fabric of the country.

So, while successful, he did not shy from controversy, and with *Rotherick O'Connor* he showed that he was prepared to go well beyond what his audience wanted or expected. The indications are that this time he went too far. This appears to have been his last play, and the prologues and epilogues to the published play show us that Shadwell was aware that the play was not popular with its audience. The first prologue, 'by Colonel Allen. *Designed to have been spoke, but came too late,*'³¹ ironically insists that the Colonel tried to persuade Shadwell out of writing the play, but that he was not to be deflected:

For all his confidence, I let him know,
A tragedy was more than he could do.
I told him what he enterprised was hard,
Presumptuous in a Greek or Irish bard.
[...]
These friendly hints I gave, but 'twould not do,
Full of himself, he would his own pursue.³²

In the first epilogue, Shadwell apologises for the play and promises to confine himself to comedy from now on, because of the audience's reception:

³¹ Wheatley and Donovan, I, p. 168.

³² '[First]Prologue to *Rotherick O'Connor*', line 5, in Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 168.

Our poet swears by all that's great and good,
 No more he'll dip his hands in human blood,
 It is his first effort in tragic strains,
 And knows not how it came into his brains.
 [...]
 But do say something in the man's behalf,
 And faith, when next he writes, he'll make you laugh.³³

The play is no better or worse than his others, but is more ambitious, being a tragedy and written in blank verse. The verse is competent, and the tragedy is engineered rather than organic, and though it suffers from excessive verbosity and exposition, and has characters given to declaration rather than dialogue, it is not that bad a play. It is full of interest to the modern reader, and should have been more so to its contemporary audience. Part of the problem, Shadwell tells us, is the upper gallery's insistence on treating everything as comedy, and the inattentiveness of the fashionable world in the middle gallery:

Now 'tis observed, our friends two story high
 Do always laugh when other people cry,
 And murdering scenes to them are comedy.
 The middle regions seldom mind the plot
 But with a Vizard chat of you know what,
 And are not bettered by the play one jot.'³⁴

That mention of 'bettered' indicates the didactic role that Shadwell intended. The play itself, while supporting the political and patriotic position of Protestant nationalism, presents some very challenging ideas to its Anglo-Irish audience about their relationship

³³ *Ibid.*, 6, p. 219.

³⁴ 'Epilogue written by Mr. Shadwell', 1720 edition of *Shadwell's Works*, I, p. 268.

with Ireland and the native Irish. In this it follows in a direct line from *Irish Hospitality*, a play that culminated in a symbolic mixing of races, cultures and classes.

This is a good example of the artist being so far ahead of his audience that he loses them. Shadwell's plays place the Dublin bourgeoisie in the early decades of the century as a potent force in the forging of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy, but, as a playwright, and a foreigner, he spoke to and about his Dublin audience; he did not speak for them.

Another voice crying in the wilderness was William Philips, author of *St. Stephen's Green*, who returned to playwrighting after more than twenty years, to pursue, as before, a definite agenda: his objective is to place the surviving Irish aristocracy at the head of the Ascendancy.

Philips' *Hibernia Freed* (1722) has the appearance of a reaction to Shadwell, but he uses history to create a different metaphor. In Philips' play, the invader, (the Danes this time), is defeated by a combination of his own folly, the stoicism of the Irish and the craft and sagacity of the Irish nobility. Shadwell acknowledged Irish virtues in his play, but Philips gives us an ancient Irish society displaying both the neo-stoic virtues of the Enlightenment and a civilization equal to ancient Greece and Rome. He surpasses Shadwell in embodying Ireland as a woman, equating conquest with rape, and asserting the refinement, culture and superior morality of the embattled Irish. Philips is declaring the surviving Irish nobility as the natural aristocracy of the country. He could hardly

have gone further to overturn the civilizing foundation myth of the Anglo-Irish as expressed by Shirley and repeated by Shadwell.

There can be no doubt that it was quite deliberate. Philips has never been given his due as the first Irish patriotic writer, his work flickering feebly beside the ferocious blaze of Swift. In *St. Stephen's Green* Philips outlined the superiority of Dublin's 'generous' society, and in *Hibernia Freed* he reinvents the ancient Irish aristocracy as a gift to contemporary Ireland. From this play, we can date the revival of the Irish aristocracy, in ruins after Aughrim, as it bids to take its place at the head of the Protestant ruling class.

Although the Irish theatre was the creation of the New English, the influence of the Old Irish or Old English gentry on it seems to have been enormous, to judge by the dedications of the playwrights. Shadwell dedicated his plays to Lady Newton, who belonged to the Butler family; Philips, having dedicated *St. Stephen's Green* to Lord Inchiquin, dedicates *Hibernia Freed* to Henry O'Brien, the Earl of Thomond, as a fellow-patriot and one directly descended from the Irish monarchs, implicitly denigrating the English-descended nobility. They have no plays dedicated to them; the Gaelic idea of literary patronage has been transferred into a new language and art-form.

In both Shadwell and Philips, the story of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy is being remoulded into the Story of the Irish Protestant Nation. What we have here is another step in its formation, and it is the story of its rulers that is being created. As Mercier points out, the Irish peasant was indifferent as to who the ruling class was: all they cared

about was how they were treated,³⁵ and Shadwell has already positioned and created a Story for the middle-class.

Philips' strategy is to use classical names where possible – Sabina, Eugenius, Herimon, and Latin forms of place names – Ultonia, Connacia, and especially Hibernia. The old Latin name is the one preferred by the Anglo-Irish writers at this period for Protestant Ireland. 'Hibernia' is the Irish Protestant Nation called into being by the eighteenth century playwrights – a free state of Protestant Aristocrats, growing naturally and legally out of ancient Ireland, a Utopia without a resentful Catholic sub-class or English interference, a free parliament and people under George I, II, or III. It is an artefact of refinement, culture, free-trade and neo-stoic bourgeois independence. It is a literary creation that elides several centuries and unites a glorious past with a bright future through a determined refusal to accept the contentious present. Illusion was a common factor in Anglo-Irish civilization, their houses, their relationship with the dispossessed, their extravagant, profligate lifestyle were all facets of their play-acting, but 'Hibernia', summoned by the playwrights, and apparently brought into being by the Volunteers, was the greatest illusion of all. According to Ibsen or Arthur Miller, such reiteration creates, not a sustaining Story but a lie large enough to live in. The difference is that in Ibsen or Miller storical artefacts are based on suppression or falsehood, not on a communal embracing of an interpretation, not on the enrapturing power of language but on the corroding protection of concealment. The two conflicting Stories of Anglo-Ireland epitomise both of these approaches; 'Hibernia' achieved two Janus-like faces: the inclusive Story of the playwrights based on language and interpretation, and the

³⁵ Mercier, *Irish Comic Tradition*, p. 155.

exclusive vision of the politicians, based on ignoring the realities that were glaringly obvious to the Earl of Clare, who in his address to the Irish Parliament during the debate on the Union in 1800, chose to drench them with a bucketful of reality.

In both *Hibernia Freed* and *Rotherick O'Connor*, 'Hibernia' is established by a wedding, or proposed wedding, between the different factions in the country. This gives the Anglo-Ascendancy some anchorage in an island that has traditions far older than Greece or Rome. This was the Augustan age, and the regaining of classical poise and civilization was always a goal; in order to gain access to the ancient Gaelic traditions, they create the illusion of Classical civilization on an island that never knew the Romans. 'Hibernia' is dotted with their houses, classical structures that impose the illusion on the landscape they stand in – another part of the Anglo-Irish theatre. Elizabeth Bowen remarks: 'In raising a family house, one is raising a theatre,'³⁶ and in these houses, they assumed their characters, performed their parts, and displayed their humours.

Hibernia Freed fabricates a classical state of Hibernia, sings its virtues, and sets it free, thereby fusing the tenth and eighteenth centuries. The play rejects the idea of 'conquest' and shows that superior force or guile can overthrow it, and is right to do so if it can. Turgesius and the Danes are despots whom their Irish subjects have to endure as a punishment for disunity and immorality. The Norman incursion, however, is legitimised as 'invited to our aid', and will succeed because it will voluntarily blend the two 'bloods'. The play portrays the Irish king, O'Brien, showing the essentially bourgeois

³⁶ Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, p. 32.

characteristic of neo-stoic resolution and constancy under the duress of superior force, while he works to overthrow it as soon as the conqueror shows a weakness, which he inevitably will do, given his enslavement by his passions.

There is no record of the play being presented in Dublin,³⁷ though it was reprinted and published in the Irish capital immediately after its staging and publication in London,³⁸ but the records of Dublin productions from this period are patchy and incomplete, consisting mainly of handbills for charity or author nights. *Hibernia Freed* was singularly successful in London, opening in Lincoln's Inn Fields' Theatre (capacity about fourteen hundred) on 13th February 1722, and was performed seven times, allowing the author to have two benefit nights – one every third night. The second benefit night was very profitable. The takings were '£86 2s.6d. in cash, and another £52 10s. in ticket sales; after house charges of forty pounds, Philips took home nearly £100'.³⁹ It would seem likely that such a play would have been produced successfully in Dublin, but if it had, some mention of it should have survived, and in the absence of such evidence, it is more likely that it was not. Perhaps the management of the theatre did not care for its sentiments, or were fearful of inciting upheaval in the theatre and in the streets at a volatile time. Wheatley and Donovan quote a contemporary account of the enthusiasm which greeted the play at its London production: 'I never knew a play so clapped [...] till a Friend put me in Mind that half the Audience were *Wild Irish*'.⁴⁰

³⁷ There is an uncorroborated date of March 31st 1722 suggested by Clark, (probably after Lawrence), given in Helen M. Burke, p. 301, n. 3.

³⁸ Title page: '*Hibernia Freed* [...] Dublin re -printed by Patt. Duggan, 1722.'

³⁹ *The London Stage, 1660-1800: a calendar of plays, entertainments & afterpieces together with casts, box-receipts and contemporary comment: compiled from the playbills, newspapers and theatrical diaries of the period.* Part 2, 1700-1729, ed. by Emmett L. Avery (Carbondale Ill.: Southern University of Illinois Press, 1960); cited by Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 301.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, cited by Wheatley and Donovan, I, p. 301.

Dublin in 1722 was in a ferment of excitement. Trade restrictions were a constantly perceived injustice; the Declaratory Act, popularly known as the Sixth of George I, had infuriated the country by giving the English Parliament the right to enact legislation directly for Ireland, and reduced the legal powers of the Irish House of Lords. George I, the first Hanoverian king, was far from universally popular. Dublin was a Whig stronghold, but many of the Irish still favoured the Jacobite cause: the Duke of Ormond was in disgrace and in exile, and in this year of 1722, Charles Boyle, the fourth Earl of Orrery, was imprisoned in the Tower of London because of his Jacobite sympathies. A cautious, conservative management may have deemed it prudent not to antagonise the authorities, or risk the fittings of their theatre, by exciting people further with a play so subversive in its implications. An enterprising publisher, though, had no qualms about disseminating it in print.

Hibernia Freed is strongly opposed to tyranny, which is personified in Turgesius the Dane, a rampant despot almost comical in his intensity. Turgesius too equates conquest with rape; to Eric, his second-in-command, he states his creed that is the opposite to the Enlightened ideal of self-control and moderation:

She also shall be mine; I will have both.
 When my desires shall droop, when cloyed with them,
 Or when new beauties give new appetite,
 I'll cast them off to thee, to other slaves. ⁴¹
 [...]
 Why have I fought, to what has conquest served,
 But for unlimited despotic power?
 And what is pow'r, but to indulge the will?
 To love, to have, to leave, and love anew.
 He that controls his passion is the slave,
 Slave to the pow'r which he himself creates.

⁴¹ William Philips, *Hibernia Freed*, III. 118.

That man is free who gratifies desire,
And whatsoe'er he wills, unchecked, performs.⁴²

O'Brien's daughter, Sabina, in her exchange with Turgesius, points out that the 'right of conquest' has no permanence, that anyone who can exert sufficient force has the right to overthrow the existing conqueror. The conqueror has no rights, only strength:

TURGESIUS	And what like conquest gives a right to empire? He who possesses greatest fortitude Should rule the world and trample on mankind. The lion hence subjects the savage herd, The eagle hence insults the feathered kind.
SABINA	How well such precepts suit a prince's mouth, Which instigate his subjects to rebel! Ye lab'ring hinds! who sweat and drudge for life, Away with all your implements of toil, Be bold, and dare, and bravely seize a crown! ⁴³

O'Brien makes the same point at the closing of Act 3:

Faith, justice, laws, obedience, gratitude,
Are cobweb bonds when empire is in view.
[...]
And by the ills which he himself has wrought,
Others are taught to overthrow the state.⁴⁴

The subtext here needs scrutiny: Philips is covertly questioning the validity of the current regime. The overthrowing of the Stuarts by force, he is saying, in an echo of Shakespeare, opens the way to anarchy, as now anyone who can summon sufficient force can overthrow the House of Orange or Hanover, and they have been taught to do so by the very success of the present incumbents. He sails even closer to the wind in the

⁴² *Ibid.*, III. 127.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, III. 207.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, III. 386.

next act by questioning the method by which the House of Orange came to rule. There is an exact parallel between the deal that Turgesius offers Sabina and that offered to William and Mary: if she will accept the crown in her father's place and marry the Dane, the two of them will ignore her father's and brother's right to the throne and rule the country together:

TURGESIUS	Reign in thy father's stead, receive his crown, And be thyself the mistress of this isle.
SABINA	What! snatch the crown from him who gave me life, Deprive my brother of his native right, And gall my country with tyrannic power! Shall I do this, shall I incur such guilt? So as to posterity transmit my shame, And so disgrace the lineage whence I spring?
TURGESIUS	Possession of a crown defaces guilt; Be wise, and taste the joys of sovereign power.
SABINA	Oh, may that crown sit heavy on my head! Oh, may the guilty load crush me to earth And rob my days of peace, my nights of rest, When I submit to reign on guilty terms. ⁴⁵

The play, then, while deploring tyranny, slyly questions whether the present regime, for all its trumpeting about freedom, is not in itself tyrannous in nature, a message that may have been too incendiary for early Georgian Dublin.

When he speaks directly of Ireland's condition in *Hibernia Freed*, Philips' anger becomes palpable. :

O'Brien lives to see his people slaves'
Compelled to rob and strip the lab'ring hinds
To feed the Dane and to support his riot.'⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, IV. 89.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 43.

These are Ireland's present complaints in the guise of historical comment. Philips knew that the Danes never conquered the country, yet that is the context he sets for his play: he chooses to show a situation analogous to the English supremacy, in which 'Hibernia' is totally under Danish/English control that has to be resisted and overthrown by the righteous 'Hibernians'. This is an angry play, but, in contrast to Swift's writings, the anger is diffused, not narrowly targeted, and Philips' language is inadequate for the task he undertakes. His phrasing and imagery are largely conventional; he does not succeed in matching his anger with a poetic language that would cause the verse to spark and burn. In *St. Stephen's Green*, the prose format demonstrated his ear for spoken dialogue, but in *Hibernia Freed* his sparkle is dimmed: the verse and the exalted rhythms of Tragedy restrain his exuberance, blunt his language, and confine him to the conventional and declaratory. Duggan gets it right when he says that the 'sentiments [are] hackneyed with the phrasing of the later Augustan poets.'⁴⁷

The play's characters are fairly wooden too, representing points of view. O'Brien is the stoic king without a kingdom; O'Neill is the warrior-king who comes to his aid; Eugenius the Bard acts as chorus and commentator; Turgesius is the despotic villain and Eric is his sleazy, Iago-like underling. The two women, Agnes and Sabina, are indistinguishable. They are really the same character: their attitudes and speeches are identical, but are split in two for dramatic purposes. Between them they articulate the Irish opposition to the Danish leaders, Turgesius and Eric, Sabina finally achieving identification with the country itself:

⁴⁷ Duggan, p. 27

SABINA Is't possible! Will nothing move thee then?
 TURGESIUS Nothing; I am determined to possess.
 SABINA (*rising*) Then I disclaim my late humility,
 Dry up my tears, and fly to heav'n for aid.
 TURGESIUS Be so protected as thy Nation was.⁴⁸

Agnes, in her altercation with Eric, confirms, in respect of the Danes, the fears that Eva expressed about the Normans in *Rotherick O'Connor*, and repeats Sarah Butler's claim that it was the very civilization and hospitality of the Irish that rendered them vulnerable to the invaders:

AGNES Hither ye came and humbly sought relief.
 Hibernia, ever kind to the distressed,
 Ever for hospitality renowned,
 Received ye famished, and relieved your wants;
 Gave towns to build, and fruitful plains to till.
 Soon was our fond credulity divulged,
 And swarms of outcasts crowded on our coast.
 Our benefits forgot, your oaths despised,
 We fell an easy prey, betrayed, surprised.
 And dost thou plead a merit from these crimes?
 Shall treason and ingratitude prevail?⁴⁹

The parallels with *Rotherick O'Connor* and the Normans are striking, and indicate that the play may have been written in response to it: the invitation to settle, the overrunning of the country, the refusal of the heroine to entertain the advances of the conqueror, symbolising the country as a female, the attempted rape of the heroine and the equating of the conquest to the rape of the country, all occur in Shadwell's play. Where Philips differs is in his invocation of the nobility and refinement of the pre-invasion culture. He goes out of his way to celebrate the pedigree of the Irish kings, as he outlined in the Dedication to Right Honourable Henry O'Brien, Earl of Thomond:

⁴⁸ *Hibernia Freed*, IV. 228.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II. 54.

An O'Brien is my hero, the head of that illustrious family will vouchsafe to be my patron. [...] None are ignorant that your lordship is lineally descended from the monarchs of it. [...] As love of my country induced me to lay the scene of a play there; so the particular honour I bear to, and ought to have for, your lordship's family, obliged me to search for a story in which one of your lordship's ancestors made so noble a figure; for what is so noble as to free one's country from tyranny and invasion.⁵⁰

In the play itself, O'Connor broadens the scope to include the pedigrees of all those Old Irish nobility:

O'CONNOR	<p>Or is he aided by his noble blood? I without boasting can allege the same. From the renowned Milesius we descend, From that illustrious source our monarch springs. [...]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">recording bards</p> <p>Sing to their harps the mighty deeds of Ir, The hundred battles by Milesius gained, And paint Gadelus' fame, and show us sprung from them.⁵¹</p>
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When the victorious O'Neill arrives to claim Sabina's hand, she paraphrases the dedication of the play in praise of him 'who frees his country from a foreign yoke', and at the same time evokes for Irish culture a correspondence with the grandeur and dignity of the Classical world in contrast to the barbarism of the Danes, an important piece of appropriation in contrast to the received idea among the English of the uncouthness and savagery of the Irish, and an act of identification by the Planter-playwright:

SABINA	<p>Bring garlands hither; strew with flow'rs his way; Statues erect, triumphal arches build, Fame stretch thy wings, thy trumpet sound aloud, Employ thy hundred tongues in his renown</p>
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⁵⁰ Dedication of *Hibernia Freed*, 'To the Right Honourable Henry O'Brien, Earl of Thomond', in Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 305.

⁵¹ *Hibernia Freed*, I. 295.

Who frees his country from a foreign yoke.⁵²

O'Neill compares himself with Achilles, both in love and war:

O'NEILL Thus Thetis' son forsook the sanguine plain,
 And war and glory courted him in vain.
 At Deidamia's feet supine he lay,
 Resigned himself to love's more gentle sway.
 Till called by fate, the hero flew to arms,
 And glory pleased, and war again had charms.⁵³

Champions are needed because the country is in a sorry state, and Ireland of the ninth century is fused with 'Hibernia' of the eighteenth, smarting under English injustice:

O'BRIEN Fertile Hibernia! Hospitable land!
 Is not allowed to feed her native sons,
 In vain they toil, and amid plenty starve.
 The lazy Dane grows wanton with our stores,
 Urges our labour, and derides our wants.
 Hibernia! Seat of learning! School of science!
 How waste! How wild dost thou already seem!
 Thy houses, schools, thy cities ransacked, burnt!⁵⁴

The dedicatee O'Brien, who was a member of the Irish Privy Council, is being summoned to head the opposition, not, perhaps, to action, but to leadership, with Ormond in exile and Orrery in jail. The idea is bruited, that it was the sins of the people that caused the calamity:

EUGENIUS The people's crimes have drawn this vengeance down
 Which the king's virtue only can remove.⁵⁵
 Where the protectors of our once blessed isle!
 Have they withdrawn their care, when we forbore

⁵² *Ibid.*, II. 270.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, III. 83.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 62.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 54.

To emulate the deeds by them performed,
And wandered from the virtuous paths they trod? ⁵⁶

It is the vices of the ordinary people that have drawn this divine wrath on them, but O'Brien is given a messianic role in lifting the curse. The idea that he will relieve the plight of his people sanctifies him. And he must do it by enduring, by being a signal example of neo-stoic forbearance:

O'BRIEN	Teach me to bear, and give me grounds to hope. ⁵⁷
	[...]
	I stand collected, and my mind prepared. ⁵⁸
	[...]
	My mind is armed to bear impending ills. ⁵⁹

Philips' play is a Summoning, just as Shadwell's dramas were. Shadwell was concerned to provide a Story for the new 'bourgeois ascendancy', but Philips is concerned to place the Story of the Irish, now Protestant, Ascendants centre stage. His play is not concerned to break the link with England as the United Irishmen did; in the 1720s, even the movement for reform was barely on the horizon, but he and Shadwell both are concerned to see a movement towards unity among the people of Ireland. They are in spirit closer to Wolfe Tone than to Jonathan Swift, who saw himself only as a spokesman for the English who lived in Ireland. Both Philips and Shadwell are building a different Story, calling into being an Ireland in which the two strands of native and colonist unite in forming the Irish Nation of 'Hibernia'.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 307.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 91.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I. 1.136.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, I. 1. 197.

O'Brien illustrates this by invoking the native ancestor, Milesius, and the English St. Patrick as equal protectors of the Irish race. This speech, reminiscent of Shirley's *St.*

Patrick for Ireland, unites the two traditions on the island against the invading enemy:

O'BRIEN And thou, great sire! from whom we boast descent,
 Implore success to thy Milesian race!
 And thou, blest saint! the patron of our isle,
 Who first didst plant among us faith divine,
 Join in the prayer and strengthen his request.
 And as envenomed insects fled the land,
 Forced by the virtue of thy sacred wand,
 A greater blessing may thy prayers obtain,
 Drive tyrants hence, and break the Danish chain.⁶⁰

Substitute 'English' for 'Danish' and 'Break the chain' has a contemporary ring: the chain of safety connecting them to England had become a symbol of servitude and powerlessness. The imagery and action of the play are not finally pessimistic, though. The play ends with a double prophecy. First, Turgesius foretells that another nation will invade the country and subdue it with great bloodshed. The villain's prophecy cannot be allowed to taint the Norman incursion by condoning it, and Eugenius, the bard, counters with a more benign forecast, in which the foreigners are 'invited to our aid', and the two races mix to their mutual advantage.

TURGESIUS But ere I part, remember I foretell,
 Another nation shall revenge my death,
 And with successful arms invade this realm.
 And if hereafter be, and souls can know
 And taste the pains which mortals undergo,
 Mine shall rejoice to see thy land subdued,
 And peasants' hands with royal blood embued;
 [...]
 EUGENIUS Another nation shall indeed succeed,
 But different far in manners from the Dane.
 (So heav'n inspires and urges me to speak)
 Another nation, famous through the world,
 For martial deeds, for strength and skill in arms,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, II. 300.

Belov'd and blest for their humanity.
 Where wealth abounds, and liberty resides,
 Where learning ever shall maintain her seat,
 And arts and sciences shall flourish ever.
 Of gen'rous minds and honourable blood;
 Goodly the men, the women heav'nly fair,
 The happy parents of a happy race,
 They shall succeed, invited to our aid,
 And mix their blood with ours; one people grow,
 Polish our manners, and improve our minds.⁶¹

O'Brien continues to accept whatever will happen as the will of fate or heaven, and that the English annexation will be all ultimately for the best, and justice will prevail:

O'BRIEN Whatever changes are decreed by fate,
 Bear we with patience, with a will resigned.
 Honour and truth pursue, and firmly trust,
 Heav'n may at last prove kind, it will be just.⁶²

The second-last line is in the Imperative Mood: an instruction to the contemporary audience to work patiently for the Irish cause, which is just, honourable and truthful, and will succeed in the end.

Even though Philips establishes O'Brien in his introduction as the hero of the play, he is only one of a trio, one from each of the ancient kingdoms; O'Brien is a fairly colourless character, whose only strength is endurance; his kingdom is saved by the cunning and courage of the two other 'native lords', O'Neill whom 'all Ultonia owns her native lord'⁶³ and O'Connor, 'a faithful band from Connacia he leads.'⁶⁴ These two lead the band of soldiers disguised as shy virgins into the heart of the Danish camp, capture Turgesius and rout the Danes. It is not just O'Brien that is being rehabilitated, but the generality of

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, V. 295.

⁶² *Ibid.*, V. 304.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, I. I. 241.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I. I. 116.

the Old Irish aristocracy that is being summoned to take command of the new ‘Hibernia’.

Fifty years later, two rather turgid plays – Francis Dobbs’ *The Irish Chief; or, The Patriot King* (Smock Alley 1773), and Gorges Edmond Howard’s *The Siege of Tamor* (Smock Alley 1774) – also delve into Irish history and legend in order to find a parallel for their contemporary situation. In them we find the complete identification of the Protestant Irish Nation with the country. Their heroes are the ancient Irish nobility, their villains are the oppressors, the Danes, who approximate the despotic and unjust actions of the English. They repeat the concerns and convictions of Philips, of whose play they seem to be unaware. In the prologue to *The Irish Chief* (performed 1773, published 1774), Dobbs claims to be the creator of the first Irish tragic hero:

But lo! tonight, what you ne’er saw before,
A tragic hero from Hibernia’s shore.⁶⁵

In the characters of their plays, Howard and Dobbs have created a template for a ruling class of ‘Hibernia’ by blending the perceived virtues of the Anglo-Irish with the acceptable traits of the ancient Irish nobility to manufacture a metaphoric unity of the two races – a middle ground which roots them in the country and frees them from the necessity of English husbandry. The process of annexation, begun by Shadwell, continuing throughout the eighteenth century, climaxes in Dobbs and Howard. The barbarous savages of the fifteenth century have metamorphosed into a refined and

⁶⁵ Francis Dobbs, ‘Prologue, written by the author’, *The Irish Chief; or, The Patriot King*, in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 86.

cultured civilization. Howard in his Address to the Reader claims: 'Ireland was at the time, the island of saints, the seat of the muses, and the nursery of heroes.'⁶⁶ and in the Prologue to the play the point is made again:

Although Hibernia's patriots might presume
To rival those of Sparta or of Rome;
Although her heroes were as bold in fight,
Her swains as faithful, and her nymphs as bright.
Here too, of yore, stupendous deeds were done,
High conquests enterprised, high honours won.
To the famed facts ten thousand harps were strung,
And what our sires achieved, our poets sung.⁶⁷

The symbols of Irishness have been annexed, some accepted, some rejected, some re-evaluated; the 'Hibernian' Ascendancy has been recast in a mould that combines the best of Anglo-Irish Protestant virtues – stoicism, endurance, steadiness – with the desirable traits of the Irish – valour, learning, resourcefulness – to create a hybrid ancestry that is echoed in the inclusive views that the plays display. Dobbs and Howard are reformers, not revolutionaries, and both end their plays with a rapprochement between the antagonists, once the injustices experienced by the Irish have been rectified. They repeat Philips also in that the method they recommend is not revolution but endurance, on insisting on the right thing until it becomes fact by reason of its self-evident rightness: God will favour the right cause and the Irish cause is just.

These are not plays of the United Irishmen. Both Dobbs and Howard were, like Philips, members of the Irish Parliament and adherents of the 'Patriot' party; they had no desire

⁶⁶ Gorges Edmund Howard, '[First Address] to the Reader (1773)', *The Siege of Tamor*, in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p.145.

⁶⁷ 'Prologue to *The Siege of Tamor* by Mr. Peter Seguin', in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p.152.

to break with England; theirs was a bourgeois dream: to achieve control over their own affairs, insofar as it affected their commerce, free of the meddling of the English parliament and vested commercial interests. Unlike Shadwell or Philips, they had no agenda for furthering any particular section of the Irish Protestant Nation. Howard, in *The Siege of Tamor*, is concerned to combat the factionalism that bedevils the country, the parliament, and eventually, the Volunteers themselves; Dobbs, who was a protégée of Charlemont, preaches against the dangers of democracy or the mob, and the necessity of an enlightened ruler's ignoring democratic pressure and following his own judgement. Both plays dip into Irish history to find a mirror for the tangled web of 'Patriotic' politics: Ceallachan, in *The Irish Chief; or, The Patriot King* is a good example of a Hibernian Ascendancy figure, an annexed ancestor and a part of its Story. The symbolization is no longer of brogue and cabin, but of kingship and noble rhetoric: the Anglo-Irish have selected their symbols and planted their roots.

These are essentially plays, like *Hibernia Freed* and *Rotherick O'Connor*, of the enlightened, liberal Ascendancy – the inclusive strand of the Irish Protestant Nation of 'Hibernia.' But this strand did not carry the day; the forces of reaction and entrenched sectarianism were too strong. We must accept that the writers from the Anglo-Irish tradition in the eighteenth century are not typical: they do not express the views of the majority of their class and race. The writers indicate one set of attitudes and convictions, events tell of another, and the events speak for the majority. The Irish Lords Justices, Undertakers, churchmen and general Protestant Ascendancy blocked every attempt at reform in Ireland that was not to their own advantage – particularly pertaining to the

majority Catholic population. They were not moved by art or the theatre. Plays of the eighteenth century are a poor relation to its architecture: Charlemont House, Leinster House, Parliament House or the Four Courts are triumphal and declaratory. Most of the ruling class preferred to spend their time in gambling and drinking at 'private routs, cards, and hazard', that 'blunts all the finer feelings and precludes that intellectual pleasure which the stage affords in other nations'.⁶⁸ Anglo-Irish society in the eighteenth century, in spite of its surface sheen, is characterised by Elizabeth Bowen as 'philistine, snobbish, limited, and on the whole, pretty graceless'.⁶⁹

In Henry Brooke's epilogue to *The Siege of Tamor* (1782) we can hear the sigh of frustration and disillusion:

Her country! Yes, her country – we are told;
A country was a precious thing of old;
Though now –
Of no use in the world – but to be sold.⁷⁰

This disillusion is openly articulated in Mary O'Brien's slight comedy, *The Fallen Patriot*, at the end of the eighteenth century and in Macklin it is loud and clear. These were the realists, who described what they saw, not what they wanted to see. Both Shadwell and Philips display a Utopian view, in which reconciliation and co-operation prevail, rather than aggression, bigotry and racism. Unfortunately, the latter was more common within the country, and is aptly expressed by Frederick Ashton's *The Battle of Aughrim*, which he wrote while a student at Trinity in 1728.

⁶⁸ Stockwell, p. 190.

⁶⁹ Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, p. 125.

⁷⁰ Henry Brooke, Esq. 'Epilogue to *The Siege of Tamor*', in Wheatley and Donovan, p.229.

This play has a peculiar history: there is no evidence of it ever getting a professional production, but Wheatley and Donovan claim that it was probably the most popular play written in Ireland before the twentieth century.⁷¹ It is a good example of the reach of the printed play: after its second publication in 1756 it ran to twenty-five more editions between then and 1840, and was commonly used as a schoolbook in Ulster.⁷²

Duggan despises *The Battle of Aughrim*: 'The tragedy', he writes, 'is one of the most remarkable examples of mediocrity achieving a measure of immortality'.⁷³ He quotes a late eighteenth century criticism of it as 'avowedly written for the vulgar and never was publication so well adapted to catch not only the Flats but the Fanatics, and fig up the Padeen mare'.⁷⁴ He continues disdainfully:

To the student of the classics the tragedy has a distinct appeal despite its frequently ludicrous verbiage: the seeker after unintentional comedy can also find here much to revel in. The piece has value too, as a political curiosity, and its main significance resides in two facts: the first that it persisted as a political play until recent times; the second that, to the uncultured, stilted language which soars to the welkin, and as easily drops to the nadir of bathos, may still appeal as the true clothing of heroic tragedy. There is after all but a small remove between the literary tastes of the groundlings of the Elizabethan age and those of today.⁷⁵

The play is an extraordinary piece. The work of a twenty-year old student, it tells the story of the battle in rollicking verse; it's easy to see how its crude energy and rhyming couplets appealed to those who like things painted in broad strokes and primary colours,

⁷¹ Wheatley and Donovan, I, p. 361.

⁷² Duggan, p. 31. The play was usually published in its later editions with Michelburne's *Ireland Preserved*, the two functioning as a History as well as an English textbook.

⁷³ Duggan, p. 31.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

but its enduring appeal questions Duggan's prim strictures. He is applying the criteria of classical tragedy, but the play should not be judged by them. Its impact is immediate; its action is vigorous; it is intensely, sometimes overly, vivid. While its derivation seems to be from the rhyming tragedies of Orrery and his contemporaries, a form that had been extinct for decades, its actual style is closer to that of a folk play. In fact, its continued popularity was due to its achieving the status of folklore, especially in Ulster, as Charles Gavan Duffy testifies:

The drama of the battle was in the hands of every intelligent schoolboy in Ulster, who strode an imaginary stage as Sarsfield or Ginkel according to his sympathies.⁷⁶

What seems to have happened is that the printed play was so widely disseminated that it became absorbed in the folk tradition, and re-emerged as a performance piece to mark communal occasions, like an Orange march, or a Christmas mumming.⁷⁷ Ashton may have been familiar with the Mumming tradition, given his Derry background, and in Donegal a mumming play survived into the mid-twentieth century that contained Patrick Sarsfield and General Ginkel as well as St. George and the Grand Turk. William Carleton recalls this process of assimilation:

In the town of Augher, this stupid play was acted by Catholics and Protestants, each party of course sustaining their own principles. The consequence was, that when they came to the conflict with which the play is made to close, armed as they were on both sides with real swords, political and religious resentment could not be restrained, and they would have hacked each other's souls out had not the audience interfered and prevented them. As it was, some of them were severely if not dangerously wounded.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 364.

⁷⁷ Thackeray testifies to its ubiquity: he spent a rainy night in Galway reading it after discovering it in an old bookshop in the town in 1842. He paraphrases and quotes extensively from it in his *Irish Sketchbook* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1990), pp. 181-189.

⁷⁸ Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 365.

The play was usually performed in a barn; its crudity would militate against it ever being taken seriously by professionals. It gripped the popular imagination, however, in the late eighteenth century and retained its hold for decades. Wheatley and Donovan give us their reason for this popularity:

The play became extraordinarily popular in the 1770s, coinciding with the rise of Irish Protestant nationalism. However, *Aughrim*'s appeal was by no means limited to Protestants, for *The Battle of Aughrim* functions on two levels: while it is primarily a celebration of the Williamite victory, modelled after heroic drama, and reflecting the continuing anxieties of the 'Protestant interest', it is also a lament for Irish Catholic patriotism, influenced by Addison's *Cato*, and suggesting the increasing awareness of the Protestants that they were now, if not Irish, no longer English.⁷⁹

But it was not its even-handedness that was its attraction; the play was popular because it precisely reflected the deep divide in Irish society. Shadwell and Philips portray an ideal society in which the two factions are included; Ashton shows accurately the schism which sundered Irish society on race and religious lines. The account of the Battle of Aughrim given by Ashton does not reflect the reality of 1691, but the perceptions of 1728 and even more, the polarisation along religious and racial lines that occurred from the mid-eighteenth-century on, when the play was reprinted and successfully caught the prevailing zeitgeist. Maurice Craig says that the period from the English Civil War, through the rebellion of 1641, the Cromwell years, the Restoration to the War of the Two Kings, with its constant shifting of allegiance, is so confused as to defy understanding.⁸⁰ This perhaps accounts for the *Battle of Aughrim*'s ambiguity, and its

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 362

⁸⁰ Maurice James Craig, *The Volunteer Earl: Being the Life and Times of James Caulfeild First Earl of Charlemont* (London: The Cresset Press, 1948), p.12.

final settling on the religious division of Catholic against Protestant as the main conflict in the play. The British/Irish opposition, the William/James conflict, the English/French dimension, are all completely overwhelmed by the religious war.

Duggan and Wheatley assert that the play balances its approval between the two forces, but, in fact it gives a lot more attention to the Catholic and Irish side. The proportion of lines and scenes spent among the Irish compared to the Dutch is two to one. As in *Philips*, the Irish side is loaded with images of republican Rome and the heroes of antiquity; the English side has a few such allusions, but nothing like the same number. The play is polarised between those who want to impose Roman Catholic rule on the country, and those who hate Rome and the Catholic Church, which is a historical absurdity, since the Popes were more likely to support William of Orange and oppose the interests of Louis XIV.⁸¹ This is the familiar pattern of appropriating and twisting Irish history to serve a propaganda purpose and to justify the present alignment of forces within the island. This play's enormous reach and influence may have been a main agent for rewriting the Williamite wars as a sectarian conflict, or a war between the Irish and the English, without pausing to wonder why the main protagonists are a German and a Frenchman.

The play is deeply divisive. More dramatically objectionable than Duggan's strictures is the failure of the play to debate the issues. It presents the two opposing factions and arguments strongly, to the point of caricature, without any interaction or discussion between them. This is the source of its attraction to the two factions, and the reason it

⁸¹ The story that the Pope ordered a *Te Deum* sung on hearing of William's success at the Battle of the Boyne appears to have been invented by Macauley: Martin Mansergh, 'Republicanism in a Christian Country', in *Studies* (2000) <<http://www.jesuit.ie/studies/articles/2000/000909.htm>> [25/05/2004] (page 2 of 8).

often begot violence. It makes no effort to balance the arguments, or to tease out where the truth lies, or to conduct a debate between the two positions; it simply states them as forcibly as possible, and lets them collide. Hence the fight at Augher that Carleton describes.

Ashton's writing is curiously ambivalent — he gilds the Irish/Catholic side with copious classical allusions, yet in his introduction, he equates Catholicism and despotism, and says Aughrim finished both. He conflates the English and Anglo-Irish; in fact he insists they are one and the same, and implicitly excludes the Irish as a hostile race, as the entire play does, racially, politically, and in religion.

This memorable battle, on which the fate of Ireland then depended, was fought on Sunday, July the 12th 1691. The effect of which, was the entire subversion of popery and arbitrary power, and surely an action which acquired so much glory to the English nation ought not to be forgot.⁸²

The Catholic commanders, though, have the best part of the lines, scenes, characters and imagery. Although they lose the battle, the Irish leaders are educated, cultured aristocrats. The Prologue, by Charles Usher, gives the wrong impression, and is openly sectarian and racist, with its dismissal of 'Teague'. Here again 'Hibernia' is invoked as the Protestant Nation of Ireland, and Usher belongs to the exclusive vision:

Here may we view how in a crimson field,
Britain's dread sons taught France and Teague to yield,
Withstood their fury in Hibernia's cause,
Then surely such a scene deserves applause.⁸³

⁸² Ashton's dedication to *The Battle of Aughrim*, in Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 366.

⁸³ 'Commendatory Verses' to *The Battle of Aughrim*, in Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 367.

But Ashton and his play are not so dismissive: in his own prologue he overturns the demeaning and belittling associations of 'Teague', and clothes the battle in Epic and Heroic colours:

Not Pompey's triumphs nor great Scipio's fame,
 Could once compare with glorious William's name:
 'Tis true, the Irish found it to their cost,
 They fought that battle bravely which they lost,
 Even like Hectors for a time they stood,
 And ere they run, they dyed the field in blood.⁸⁴

These are not ignorant teagues, but aristocrats misguided by their religion and allegiance to Rome. Wheatley and Donovan are wrong in saying that the play laments the passing of Catholic patriotism. Sarsfield, Talbot, or O'Neill, the leaders on the Irish, Catholic, Jacobite side, were the Gaelic and Norman aristocracy, and Ashton knew that, though defeated and their society and way of life more or less broken, they hadn't disappeared by any means. Some had made their mark on the Continent, but most had stayed, and through judicious conversions and other manoeuvres, their sons and grandsons were already stepping back as figures of authority into the corridors of 'Hibernian' power, ready, as Philips put it: to 'mix their blood with ours; one people grow'.⁸⁵ By now it had become clear that the Irish nobility, through its converts, was once again a power in the country.

⁸⁴ Ashton's Prologue, in Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 367.

⁸⁵ William Philips, *Hibernia Freed*, V. 317.

Chapter VI

The Humours of 'Hibernia'

The Gentlemen's Quarrel; Thomas Sheridan's Captain O'Blunder; Richard Cumberland's Major O'Flaherty; Charles Macklin's Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan & Murrough O'Dogherty; Richard Brinsley Sheridan's Sir Lucius O'Trigger & Lieutenant O'Connor.

The historical plays indicate two paradigms contending within the metaphoric citadel of 'Hibernia' – a Planter strand and an indigenous one. Any colonial society is predicated on a caste system – colonists at the top, and the indigenous inhabitants forming a servile or service underclass, and the Penal Laws were an attempt to engineer such a society. But the Irish soon spotted their weak point: the laws were based on religious affiliation, and hypocritically offered Catholics the path to self-betterment in the expectation that they would not take it. But the framers of the Penal Laws belonged to the English tradition and were intrinsically respectful of law and order; the Irish treated the law, and especially the Penal Laws, with contempt, and soon found ways around and through them. Ignatius Gahagan, a 'convert' from Catholicism in 1757, dismissed any moral squeamishness: 'I would rather at any time entrust God with my soul than the laws of Ireland with my lands.' In 1752, a commentator noted that 'the acts relating to purchases made or leases taken by papists are so eluded by perjuries, trusts in protestant names and other contrivances that they are of little significance.'¹

By 1745, 'Hibernia' found itself with a powerful, and, in many cases, wealthy underclass, led by an insolent, contemptuous Gentry that had vaulted easily over its defences by observing the letter of the law in converting to the established church, while retaining its atavistic hold on the indigenous population.

The 'Hibernia', that was summoned by the playwrights was an aristocratic Protestant utopia; in reality it became a bourgeois sectarian statelet. The tension between the two exemplars can be seen in the contrast between the two prologues in *The Battle of*

¹ Kevin Whelan, 'An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 10, (1995), 7-23 (p.10).

Aughrim, and also in the evolution of the term 'Protestant Ascendancy', which was a coining, not by the Aristocracy, or even the Gentry, but by the established Church and the Dublin bourgeoisie, in response to the Irish resurgence in the eighteenth century and the move towards the granting of rights to Catholics.²

The tensions and oppositions between these two tendencies in 'Hibernia', as well as the increasing strain between the Hibernians and England, can be followed in the plays of the period, and also in the events that effected the theatres and those who worked in them.

In 1747 the Theatre Royal at Smock Alley, under the management of Thomas Sheridan proved an unwelcoming platform for the clash of these two ideologies, by provoking an explosive debate on the ongoing obsession about the role and image of a Gentleman in Irish society. The ensuing dispute served to highlight the tensions between the two alternative version of 'Hibernia' and 'Hibernian' society – the infiltrators and the defenders.

The rebellion and invasion of Scotland in 1745 set Britain in an uproar before the final defeat and elimination of the Jacobite threat at the Battle of Culloden, but for the duration of that war Ireland remained quiet; all the rhetoric of the Gaelic poets about the '*gile mear*' came to nothing as the leaders of the Catholic interest hastened to assure the authorities of their unswerving loyalty to the Hanoverian dynasty. Protestant churchmen were foremost in encouraging their congregations to avoid any intimidation or annoyance of their Catholic neighbours, and the crafty, prudent machinations of the

² W.J.McCormack, 'Eighteenth-century Ascendancy: Yeats and the Historians', in *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 4, (1989), 159-181; and James Kelly, 'Eighteenth-Century Ascendancy: A Commentary', in *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 5, (1990), 173-187.

Viceroy, Lord Chesterfield, convinced Catholics that the English authorities were the best guarantors of their safety against any Protestant outrages. The quiescence of the country emphasises the placidity and Augustan self-control of 'Hibernia', but the flurry of activity indicates a deeper instability that had to be managed, that was too important to be ignored but too widespread to be repressed. The resurgence of the native Irish gentry, partly as an aristocracy, partly as a plutocratic Catholic or convert middle-class, instead of furthering an inclusive 'Hibernian' society, as envisaged by William Philips in *Hibernia Freed*, provoked a hostile response from the Protestant Establishment, who were, in their turn, despised as 'mushrooms' by the scions of the old Irish families. After the Plantations, many of the older families had become 'middlemen' on their former lands, becoming again the *de facto* owners and forming a semi-underground gentry, while prominent converted families allowed their Catholic branches to flourish in the shadow of their protection – the Butlers of Kilkenny and the MacMurrough Kavanaghs of Wicklow for example. The true-blue Protestants protested against the rising prosperity and insouciance of the Irish Catholics or converts, (they lumped them together), and as the Catholic Committee was formed in 1756 to demand the reform of the Penal Laws and the end of discrimination, the country was set to split on the sectarian lines that gave rise to the popularity of *The Battle of Aughrim*, which had its second of many publications in that same year.

Thomas Sheridan, the manager of Smock Alley from 1745 often compared his theatre to the state – 'a State wherein the Lives and Properties of all Subjects are equally under the protection of the laws', he wrote, 'wherein no man shall be restrained from saying or doing anything that is consistent with Reason and Truth',³ and the theatre enacted in microcosm the dissensions within the state. The first convulsion came with the Kelly

³ Sheridan, *An Humble Appeal to the Public*, Morash, p. 49.

riots of 1747, which spread to become the controversy known as the Gentlemen's Quarrel.

Edmund Burke was a student of Trinity at the time, and gives an account of the 'grand Theatrical squabble between Mr. Kelly gentleman, and Sheridan the Player.'⁴

Sometime ago there was a play performed here which greatly pleased the town called Aesop. During the performance Mr. Kelly comes in flushed with Liquor and going into the Green Room where the players dress begun to entertain the actresses with the most nauseous bawdy and ill language, called them bitches and whores, put his hands under their petticoats and would have forced some of them (if his ability answered his inclination). This was represented to Sheridan who is manager of the theatre, upon which he ordered Kelly out of the house. Enraged at this he goes into the pit and as soon as Sheridan came on the stage pelted him with oranges [...] and called him a thousand ill names, bidding him go off the stage and quite interrupting the performance. At length Sheridan advances to the front of the stage and tells him that unless some gentleman takes care of him he would be obliged to turn him out of the house. Ten times more enraged at this, he goes after the act to Sheridan's room and insults him again. Sheridan represented calmly to him his abuse of the female players and of himself – and he persisting in his ill language, Sheridan gave him a good flogging, which he bore with Christian patience, not however without vowing revenge – which he effected the next night by bringing such a party as hindered Sheridan from playing, broke open all the doors, and would probably have killed him if he had not escaped, (by the usage they gave the playhouse tailor). These doings made him shut up the playhouse and indict Kelly, who also indicted him. During this time thousands of States of Cases, answers, replies &c flew about from both parties, and a great deal of dispute concerning the word Gentleman; for it seems Sheridan had said he was as good a gentleman as Kelly or (as others would have it) as any in the house. This gained Kelly a great party who called their cause the Gentleman's quarrel, taking it extremely ill that a Gentleman should be struck by a Player, and insisted that Sheridan should never play till he had publicly asked Kelly's pardon.⁵

Kelly's behaviour seems outrageous to the modern sensibility, but his conduct was not unusual for its time, nor for Smock Alley. Garrick had the same problems in London, and the young gentlemen of the town were no worse in Dublin than elsewhere. But Thomas Sheridan was both the cause and the recipient of much aggravation; Benjamin

⁴ Edmund Burke, 'To Richard Shackleton – 21 February 1746/7', in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 10 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958-1978) I, p. 82.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Victor, who was deputy manager of the theatre at the time gives an account of the conditions under which the actors worked:

I have often exclaimed loudly and publicly against the indecency of the scenes, by the admission of every idler that had a laced coat, the youth of the College were in the custom of crowding to every morning rehearsal. I have seen actors and actresses rehearsing within a circle of forty or fifty of those young gentlemen. I proposed several methods for the redressing of these grievances; which were all objected to by the Manager, as too dangerous to be executed in Dublin, his common reply was, 'you forget yourself, you think you are on English ground.' ⁶

Common though the problem was, the Kelly incident was a stone that dislodged an avalanche, because it polarised the two interests or factions in the country and set them at loggerheads – two ideas of a Gentleman, and two visions of 'Hibernia'.

On the one side was Sheridan, who was inching the theatre and the acting profession towards respectability, who was a friend of the Viceroy and caressed by the Castle. He came of a family embedded in the establishment, and chose plays and commissioned prologues and epilogues, during the unsettled days of 1745, by virulent anti-Catholics such as Henry Brooke and Joseph Lucas, that were designed to appeal to the Anglophile, Whig, Protestant bourgeois of Dublin. On the other side, from the Establishment's perspective, were ranged the old forces of disorder and discord, in the theatre and the state: a Country party, many Irish, many converts, many secret Jacobites, newly assertive of their ancient lineage, who despised the 'mushrooms' of the New Protestant establishment, and who seized on the opportunity to pick on Sheridan as a weak link in the Establishment chain. The Establishment reacted angrily to this rowdy incursion into its defining, reflective, theatrical mirror by attempting to subdue or expel it. The theatre

⁶ Sir John Gilbert, *History of the City of Dublin*, 3 vols. (Dublin: McGlashan & Gill, 1854-59) <<http://indigo.ie/~kfinlay/Gilbert/gilbert1.htm>> [accessed 01/06/2004] (II, p. 81).

became the cockpit for a broader ideological struggle between alternative visions of 'Hibernia.'

What constituted a gentleman, and above all, an Irish gentleman, is, as we have seen, an on-going obsession of the Irish drama, and the Kelly affair caused the debate to spill over from the theatre into the streets and set the town in an uproar. The nature of a gentleman was unfixed, formless and shifting, as the bourgeoisie rose to prominence and power, and the Irish families re-appeared, slightly revised and repackaged, either nobility in their own right, or as the middleman class, positioning themselves just beneath such of the nobility and landed gentry as were not absentees already, choking off their connection to, and influence over, their peasantry and tenants.

To the resurgent Irish gentry, obsessed with pedigree and genealogy, the idea of a Player being a gentleman was ridiculous, but within the metropolitan experience of Sheridan, the aspiration was not abnormal: Ogilby, Ashbury and Elrington, previous managers of the theatre, had mingled easily with the social and political powers of Dublin, and Sheridan always saw himself as a manager rather than a player, drawing his income from the profits of the theatre but taking no payment for his acting. He loved the trappings of respectability, and revelled in the title of 'Esq.', by which the gallery delighted in sarcastically calling for him.⁷ His protestations, however, betray the weakness of his case: he was clearly only too aware of the stigma attached to the profession of actor, even though great efforts were being made to raise the status of the profession at the time. The playwright Charles Macklin sardonically observes:

⁷ *Sighs and Groans*: 'The Wags in the Gallery begun their Raillery to entertain the House, and called upon him by his beloved Title of Thomas Sh-----n Esq; come on the Stage – but this tho' repeated as in Court three times, was also rejected.', in Helen M. Burke, *Riotous Performances: The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theatre, 1712-1784* (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 238.

The players all resided in the vicinity of the theatres, so that they could attend rehearsal without inconvenience, or expense of coach-hire. But I do not know how the change has been effected; we, the actors, are all now looking out for high ground, squares, and genteel neighbourhoods, no matter how far distant from the theatres, as if local selection could give rhythm to the profession, or genteel neighbourhoods instantaneously produce good-manners.⁸

The Beefsteak Club that Sheridan formed to bind himself closer to the authorities in the Castle was presided over by Peg Woffington, because of her beauty, intelligence, and wit, but as Sheridan's daughter, Alicia Le Fanu, points out : 'her moral character was such as to exclude her from the society of her own sex. Mr. Sheridan found it impossible, therefore, to introduce her to his wife.'⁹ Mrs. Bellamy or Garrick could enjoy a huge success in Dublin, grace the Castle balls, be guests of honour at the Viceroy's levees, but still be barred from the drawing rooms of respectable women. Actors could be gentlemen by birth, but they lost caste by going on the stage. The Sheridan family had been granted land in Cavan after the rebellion of 1641, lost it for supporting King James, but regained it when Thomas Sheridan's father married the heiress to their former estate in 1710.¹⁰ Dr. Sheridan had been a friend of Dean Swift, and had been held in high esteem for his school in Dublin, so Thomas Sheridan's standing by birth was not in doubt, but his enemies held that by becoming a Player he had forfeited the title of gentleman. In the trial that followed the Gentlemen's Quarrel the lawyer defending Kelly ridiculed Sheridan's pretensions:

Mr. Daly stood up, and said, my Lord, I am employed as counsellor for -- Kelly, Esquire; but I don't understand who this Th---- S-----n, Gentleman, is. Sh-----n's council answered, it was Mr. Sh-----n patentee of the Theatre Royal in Smock Alley. Oh! says he, I understand tish Mr. Sheridan the actor: well, I have heard of gentleman shaylors and gentlemen tailors, but it is the first I heard of gentlemen actors and gentlemen merry andrews.¹¹

⁸ Hillman's Hyperlinked and Searchable Chambers' Book of Days
<www.thebookofdays.com/months/July/11.htm>, [accessed 28/09/04] (page 1 of 3).

⁹ Morash, p. 60.

¹⁰ 'The Sheridan estates at Cuilcagh, Co. Cavan', <<http://homepage.eircom.net/~leeaa/Doughty.htm>> [accessed 01/11/2004] (page 1 of 30).

¹¹ Helen M. Burke, p. 143.

The crux of the matter was that Sheridan, a 'Player' even in Edmund Burke's sympathetic account, had thrashed a gentleman as if he were a servant or a peasant, and the gentleman he had beaten was of the faction of prickly Irish converts; it was an action begging for trouble. The Kelly faction, because they did not consider Sheridan a gentleman, would not challenge him to a duel, so their only course of action was to punish him personally or through his theatre, which they proceeded to attack. The Gentlemen's Quarrel split 'Hibernian' society: the Establishment, in the form of the Courts, the Protestant patriots like Lucas and Brooke, and the Scholars of Trinity College, all took Sheridan's part. They saw themselves threatened by a riff-raff of dubiously converted Irish gentlemen, who flaunted on the one hand the supremacy and age of their claims to gentility, and on the other the equality of their attachment to the present establishment. The Establishment's response was to isolate and humiliate this troublesome upstart part of 'Hibernia.'

Edmund Burke's' account continues:

The Scholars, who had till now stood neuter, seeing how ill one of their body was treated, and the town deprived of their diversion by a private pique, took the affair on themselves and encouraged Sheridan to open the Theatre again, which he did and acted Richard III, where a numerous body of the Scholars appear'd to keep peace. At the beginning the party began to be riotous but by proper menaces they were kept quiet and one or two of the principal turned out. Thus the play went on regularly to the satisfaction of the audience. Next night was to be acted *The Fair Penitent* for the benefit of the Hospital for Incurables; the Scholars were persuaded that common humanity on account of the charitable design of the play would keep the faction quiet, so not above seven or eight were there that night – but they were mistaken, for no ties of Honour or Religion could bind 'em. They raised another tumult, called for Sheridan to wreak their Vengeance on him and drove the actors off the stage. Not content with this, some of them abused the few Scholars that were there, pelted them with oranges, declared there were no Gentlemen among them, but that they were all a pack of scoundrels. The Scholars being informed of this, early next morning searched the whole town for Mr. Martin, the principal offender, and not finding him, returned to the College, when, about ten, they were informed where he lay (at that time I came to the College and joined the rest). They

immediately went for him and found him in bed. They made him rise and brought him to the College where after making him sensible of his crime, he kneeled down in a large circle of us and owned his fault and begged pardon. Then we agreed to seize Captain Fitzgerald and went to the number of about a hundred well armed to Castle Street where he lived, and as they opened not the door, went in at a window and brought out Mr. Fitzgerald whom they put in a coach with John Browne Esq. of the Neale,¹² and two Scholars well armed and conveyed the coach under a strong guard of us to the College where he was obliged to make his submission. Kelly then to avoid ill usage came of himself and did the same. That evening came a letter from the Lords Justices desiring in a very polite manner that we should not go out in large bodies, and that they would look into the affair and give us due satisfaction. In the meantime those above mentioned Gentlemen notwithstanding their promise of better behaviour, threatened the lives of the Scholars when they met any of 'em alone and hired ruffians to assault them at night. The Scholars incensed at this once more were resolved to punish 'em, but the Provost, to avoid bloodshed, ordered that none of the Scholars should be suffered out, and in the meantime sent those whose lives were threatened to my Ld. Chief Justice, who sent a tipstaff for Martin, so that affair ended. Kelly and Sheridan's trials came on a Thursday, in which Sheridan was honourably acquitted and Kelly found guilty and fined this day £500 – a month's close imprisonment, and to give security for his behaviour for seven years. So ended this affair in which justice took place.¹³

The affair may have ended but the problem only lay dormant, as it erupted again in 1754 with worse results.

After the Gentlemen's Quarrel, Smock Alley became a more orderly place, and Sheridan was able to clear the stage of its spectators, and impose other reforms on the auditorium, but it came to reflect its manager, as Edmund Burke pointed out in his paper *The Reformer*, in its orderly dullness, its championship of English plays and English ways, and its dangerous unwillingness to reflect any other strand in Irish society.¹⁴ Burke ridiculed Sheridan's title of 'Reformer': taming the audience does not make for better theatre, all it does is produce the same quotient of dullness in the auditorium as is

¹² On the same day as the Kelly riot, 21st of January 1747, Browne had killed his cousin in a duel in Mayo, because he rejected Browne's application to join a loyalist club that refused anyone whose grandparents had been Catholics: James Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour: Duelling in Ireland 1570-1680* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), pp 57-59. Browne left the scene quickly and fled to Dublin.

¹³ Edmund Burke, *Correspondence*, I, p. 83.

¹⁴ T. O. McLoughlin, 'The Context of Edmund Burke's *The Reformer*', in *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 2, (1987), 37-55.

already to be found on the stage – a safe theatre, well-trying plays, unadventurous repertoire, a dull theatre for dull burghers.¹⁵

To be fair to Sheridan, he tried to make peace with Kelly and defuse the tension between the two factions, by forgoing his fine, and going bail to get Kelly out of his jail sentence. Possibly in response to the criticism of Burke and his friends, he premiered two works by Irish playwrights during the next season of 1749, but Henry Brooke's *Jack the Giant Killer*, a satire on bad governors, was banned by the Lords Justices after one night, and Darcy's *Orphan of Venice* only ran for two. Signor Pasquali's masque, *The Triumph of Hibernia*, was more to the taste of the audience and ran for seven.¹⁶ After this failure, he reduced his theatre and his repertoire to the level of his audience. He was dedicated to giving them what they wanted, and what the 'bourgeois gentry' wanted was a well-trying repertoire, indicative of their equal level of culture with London. The only thing that excited them was the prospect of trouble in the theatre, or a perceived racial insult in practically any Irish character created for the stage.

With rare exceptions, the Irish characters in eighteenth century plays are sympathetically-drawn Gentry; there are none of the nobility, and few enough of the lower-classes. Duggan draws attention to one of the few exceptions: in *The Humours of Oxford* (1730), by Rev. James Miller, an Irish nobleman is described by one of his rivals:

He has all the sneering malice, insinuating flattery and knavish cunning of his own country; skulking under the pleasing mask of French foppery, and affected good humour, he has the skin of a chameleon and the poison of a

¹⁵ Dr. Johnson remarked: "Sheridan is dull, naturally dull; but it must have taken him a deal of pains to have become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, sir, is not in nature." Robert Herring, ed., intro. to R. B. Sheridan's *The Rivals*, (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. ix.

¹⁶ Esther K. Sheldon, *Thomas Sheridan of Smock Alley* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967) p.138.

snake, and is an exception to the general notion that Ireland produces no venomous creatures.¹⁷

Even this is a backhanded compliment, pointing up, as it does, the rarity of such specimens; but it transpires that he is, in fact, not even the real thing but another sham lord.

Even though the villainous Irishman is very rare, playwrights have to take pains in their published work to justify their Irish creations, and to insist on their good faith, lack of malice and 'Hibernian Correctness'. George Colman the Elder's portrait of an Irish adventurer in *The Oxonian in Town* (1769) so offended the Irishmen in the audience that they rioted and closed it down, but Colman insists in his preface to the Irish edition that he has been misunderstood:

So far from intending to cast an illiberal reflection on the Irish nation, it was evidently the author's main design to vindicate the gentlemen of that country from the reproach deservedly incurred by worthless adventurers and outcasts. The gentlemen of Ireland appeared the foremost in his defence.¹⁸

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) was badly received at first. "A Briton" wrote to the London *Morning Post* complaining of Sir Lucius O'Trigger: 'It is the first time I ever remember to have seen so villainous a portrait of an Irish Gentleman, permitted so openly to insult the country upon the boards of an English theatre.'¹⁹ Sheridan promptly recast the part, removing John Lee and giving it to Lawrence Clinch, whose playing transformed it; the actor, not the author, altered the perception of the part. Sheridan acknowledged this by writing, in gratitude, the part of Lieutenant O'Connor in *St. Patrick's Day* for Clinch's benefit night. The main objection, however, was not to Sir

¹⁷ Duggan, p. 271.

¹⁸ Duggan, p. 275.

¹⁹ Morash, p.55.

Lucius but to the play's excessive length, and Sheridan reduced it by cutting down the parts of Julia and Faulkland. He was aware that offence had been taken to Sir Lucius, but in the preface to the published play, while he apologizes for the earlier faults, he does not do so for Sir Lucius. He implies that those who were offended were too sensitive, and were objecting, (as happened later to Synge), not to the character, but to the author's perceived intention of offending, which he totally denies. Nor does he recant on the accuracy of the earlier incarnation of Sir Lucius:

It is not without pleasure that I catch at an opportunity of justifying myself from the charge of intending any national reflection in the character of Sir Lucius O'Trigger. If any gentleman opposed the piece from that idea, I thank them sincerely for their opposition; and if the condemnation of this comedy (however misconceived the provocation) could have added one spark to the decaying flame of national attachment to the country supposed to be reflected on, I should have been happy in its fate, and might with truth have boasted that it had done more service in its failure than the successful morality of a thousand stage-novels will ever effect.²⁰

From all of this we might deduce that the sympathy shown on the page did not transfer to the stage, or that the brogue, blarney and blunders of the characters were more offensive to the Irish in the audience than their virtues were attractive.

Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* (1771) sums up in Major O'Flaherty many of these Irish characters: their natural virtues are manifold, their occasional linguistic idiosyncrasies may be comic but not intended by the author as disparaging :

Another hero your excuse implores,
Sent by your sister kingdom to your shores;
Doom'd by religion's too severe command
To fight for bread against his native land:
A brave, unthinking, animated rogue,
With here and there a touch upon the brogue;
Laugh, but despise him not, for on his lip
His errors lie: his heart can never trip.²¹

²⁰ 'Sheridan's Preface' to *The Rivals*, ed. Robert Herring, (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. xxviii.

But Francis Dobbs 'Prologue to *The Irish Chief: or, The Patriot King*, (staged 1773, published 1774), takes the opposite tack, and insists that the depiction of the Irish on stage has been racially inaccurate and linguistically demeaning:

Full oft hath honest Teague been here displayed;
 And many a roar have Irish blunders made;
 The bull, the brogue, are now so common grown,
 That one would almost swear they were – your own.
 But, lo! tonight, what you ne'er saw before,
 A tragic hero from Hibernia's shore;
 Who speaks as you do, both of men and things;
 And talks heroics, just like other kings....
 [...] The stage [...] is strangely altered from its first intent.
 Were we by it to judge Ierne's sons
 They are all honest – but they all are clowns.
 Yet truth hath said, and I shall take her word,
 That some have graced a court – and some a cord.
 Know ye what part I act, who speak so well?
 I'd lay my life not one in ten can tell;
 So many lines without an Irish howl,
 Without *by Jasus*, or *upon my shoul*;
 'Tis strange indeed – nor can I hope belief,
 When I declare myself the *Irish Chief*.²²

Dobbs refers to unflattering portraits of the Irish that have built up a false impression, but since so many of the playwrights and actors were Irish, it is reasonable to expect truth in the Irish characters created, and the characteristics they display are benevolence, spontaneity, wit and natural goodness. There is nothing to object to, except, perhaps, the way they speak – with 'an Irish howl...*by Jasus* or *upon my shoul*' as Dobbs has it. But the playwrights do not write brogue; as a rule, they write standard English, with Irish interjections – what Cumberland calls 'here and there a touch upon the brogue.' The actors may have been responsible, as this was the age in which the actors' prestige rose to great heights while the literary value of the plays sank by comparison, but the

²¹ Richard Cumberland, *The West Indian*, in *'The Beggars' Opera' and Other Eighteenth Century Plays*, (London: Everyman's Library, 1974), Prologue, p. 343.

²² Dobbs, *The Irish Chief*, Prologue, 11 & 24, in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 86.

evidence indicates that the actors did not emphasise the brogue. There is a deal of difference between an Irish accent, which is natural, and an Irish brogue, which is essentially artificial; the brogue would only interpose a layer of obfuscation between the actor and the audience. Duggan is of this opinion: 'Irishmen such as Joseph Millar made their mark on the stage; [...] while they gave spirited representations of Irish characters, they did so without a brogue.'²³

The archetypal popular Irish stage character, referred to above by Dobbs, was Teague in *The Committee; or, The Faithful Irishman*, (1690), by Robert Howard, one of the most popular plays of the eighteenth century: it was republished nine times between 1710 and 1797, and anthologised at least four times.²⁴ 'Honest' Teague, who was so popular he became generic, is a crafty servant in the tradition of Plautus, and a prototypical resourceful Irish menial. He is, however, native Irish and a servant; the 'Hibernians' did not care how their servants were portrayed on stage, nor did they care about any distorted representations of the native Irish. Servants speaking with brogue and blunder did not reflect any discredit on 'Hibernia'. Nor did the picture of Teig O'Divilly, the lecherous Irish priest, created by Thomas Shadwell, (the father of Charles), bother them in the least; the two plays in which he appears, *The Lancashire Witches*, and *The Amorous Bigotte* were popular in Dublin and constantly revived.²⁵

What they are objecting to is the portrayal of the Irish Gentry, yet such characters are almost invariably drawn sympathetically. If they are rogues, they are lovable rogues, if they are adventurers, they are honourable after their own fashion, like Roebuck in *Love*

²³ Duggan, p. 285.

²⁴ 'Sir Robert Howard'

<http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/h/Howard,R/life.htm> [accessed 13/04/02] (page 1 of 5).

²⁵ John Greene, 'The Repertory of the Dublin Theatres, 1720-1745', in *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 2, (1987) 133-148, (p. 143).

and a *Bottle*, Major O'Flaherty, or Lieutenant O'Connor in *St. Patrick's Day*. Their virtues easily outweigh any vices they may have, and the vices are not really vicious, but a prickly sense of their own, and their country's, worth and honour, a weakness for drink and women, and a penchant for swearing and bending the English language. But though the Irish gentry are shown in a flattering light, what the 'Hibernians' dislike are the external signifiers of Irishness that they carry; above all it is the brogue that they object to most strongly, as Dobbs indicates above, with its connotations of linguistic inferiority that spreads to encompass a general cultural dismissal. 'It is no sooner discovered', wrote Swift, 'than it makes the deliverer in the last degree ridiculous and despised, and from such a mouth an Englishman expects nothing but bulls, blunders and follies.'²⁶ But as the century progressed, Macklin unpicked the brogue and rewove Irish speech as an attractive linguistic cloak, and other indications of Irishness also assumed a superior aura – like the patronymic O' in *The Fallen Patriot*:

LADY GREYLEY Won't you put an O to your title, and be a Milesian?
 Who can dispute it now that you are a baronet? Besides, there's the
 O'Callaghans, the O'Donovans, the O'Donoghues, and the
 O'Doghertys, all have put O's to their names, that I am sure have no
 more right than we have.[...] Why it's all the *ton* in this country.²⁷

The citizens of 'Hibernia' found the mere act of differentiation offensive; insecure in their provincialism and colonialism they are quick to take offence and challenge anyone who dares to diminish them. Shadwell's merchant, Tradewell, in *The Plotting Lovers* is a typically prickly bourgeois: 'And does your Squireship take us Merchants of Dublin to be such Cods-heads,' he snarls at the English Trelooby.²⁸ But through the century there is a trend that is marked very clearly in the plays under discussion – a movement away

²⁶ Swift, 'On Barbarous Denominations in Ireland', Corpus of Electronic Texts Ed.
 < <http://celt.ucc.ie/published/E700001-006/nav.html> > [accessed 12/10/2004] (p. 346).

²⁷ Mary O'Brien, *The Fallen Patriot*, I. 1, in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 238.

²⁸ Charles Shadwell, *The Plotting Lovers; or, The Dismal Squire*, in *Shadwell's Works*, II, p. 328.

from the acceptance of the superiority of all things English to an embracing of Irishness as a badge of quality. *St. Stephen's Green* was an early broadside in the campaign; it spread to *The Sham Prince* and *The Hasty Wedding*, and is blasting on all fronts in the historical plays just discussed, as Philips, especially, maps out a new iconography for 'Hibernia.' In this campaign, symbols are a potent weapon. Certain images of Irish inferiority have to be discarded, new symbols acceptable to an Augustan age and civilization substituted to act as a unifier for the nation. Cabins and potatoes need to vanish, but above all it is the accusation of wearing 'brogues' that is the most offensive slurs on the Hibernians. Swift writes of 'that unpolite covering for the feet' that is 'a national reproach', and attributes to Wood of the Ha'pence the challenge that we 'the true English people of Ireland' must 'either take these halfpence or eat our brogues'²⁹

Brogues are the great divider of this society: they are the visible symbols of inferiority; there are those with brogues and those with shoes, and the change from one to the other signifies a leap as far-reaching as changing religion. The Duke of Ormond remarked, in 1678 on those who left the country wearing brogues and returned wearing shoes, after perjuring themselves in the aftermath of the Popish Plot.³⁰ Squire Daudle in Shadwell's *The Hasty Wedding* also notes the process of debroguening, and, like Ormond, he too smells treachery:

SQUIRE DAUDLE

Here's a jade, now; it is not above two years ago since she was taken out of an Irish cabin with her brogues on, and yet begins to despise her own country, and is fond of everything that's English.[..] I think we have enough enemies abroad, without encouraging those within ourselves. [...] She that will betray her own country would no doubt betray me.³¹

²⁹ Letter 4, *Drapier's Letters*, in *The Portable Swift*, p.198.

³⁰ Carte, *Life of Ormond*: 'Those that went out of Ireland with bad English and worse clothes are returned well bred gentlemen, well coronated, periwigged and clothed. Brogues and leather straps are converted to fashionable shoes and glittering buckles.' IV, p. 386.

³¹ *The Hasty Wedding*, III, in *Shadwell's Works*, II, p. 56,

The change of footwear is, of course, indicative of a change in fortune; shoes cost money, but a brogue was simply a square of leather, or an old felt hat, worn wrapped around the foot and tied at the ankle. So strong was this symbolization that the method of speech came to have the same signifier as the covering for the feet, but it proved more difficult to get rid of the Irish way of speaking than to dispose of one's brogues. To the outrage of the 'Hibernians', all of them were considered to speak with a brogue. The English language, which had united them to their fellow-Englishmen and separated them from the savage Irish, had betrayed them by becoming contaminated with Irish intonation and inflection; the Irish had appropriated the imported language, treating it irreverently, bending and twisting it in a way that to the English sensibility seemed coarse and ungenteel, but in effect was pulling it loose from its moorings and pushing it off on an adventure that still continues. To the Irish, language is less a tool for communication than a toy to play with, and English has proved a wonderful toy. To the Anglo-Irish, 'brogue' was the adopted patois of the Irish, but to the English on the other side of the Irish Sea it was the badge of all who inhabited this island. 'They look upon us', writes Swift, 'as a sort of savage Irish, whom our ancestors conquered several hundred years ago'.³² But by 1760, the tide had turned, and the English language of Ireland was considered by its speakers to be superior to all other variants. Macklin was able to talk proudly of our 'good, plain, old Irish English'³³ and English visitors to Dublin were annoyed by the Dubliners' claim to speak better English than Londoners. John Bush in *Hibernia Curiosa* (1769) records that many of the 'middling class of gentry' and 'people in trade' had 'the ridiculous vanity' of considering their English better

³² Letter 4, *The Drapier's Letters*, in *The Portable Swift*, p. 195.

³³ *The True-born Irishman*, II. in *Four Comedies*, ed. by J.O. Bartley (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1968), p. 111.

than that spoken by the people of London, and even considered that 'their gentility as much exceeds that of London as their pronunciation.'³⁴

The Irish language shows up nowhere in the plays, apart from one telling interjection by Macklin; it is the speech of the non-entities, a signifier of the social and political wilderness. Swift despised it: 'I encountered near a hundred words together which I defy any creature in human shape, except an Irishman of the savage kind, to pronounce,' he wrote.³⁵ It was not one of the symbols appropriate for colonisation, but for elimination. Saint Patrick, on the other hand, is frequently sworn by, with or without a brogue: 'By the sacred crook of St. Patrick', pledges Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan. Another that is just appearing is the 'island of saints'³⁶, which flowed directly from Saint Patrick's arrival, and for which the colonists can claim the credit, and which they perceive was destroyed by a non-English, Danish invasion.

The transformation of the 'English of Ireland' into the Protestant Irish was a process that took most of the eighteenth century, and progressed patchily. Swift, writing in 1724 speaks of Molyneux as 'an English gentleman born here,'³⁷ and of the opposition to Wood's Halfpence: 'It is the true English people of Ireland who refuse it, although we take it for granted that the Irish will do so too whenever they are asked.'³⁸ The Irish are the native Catholic fauna and beneath his political and social notice. Dobbs and Howard proceed from this rejection to the embracing of 'Tamor' (Tara) and 'king of Ireland', by mingling Irish triumphs over the Danes with evocations of 'liberty' and 'the Boyne.' But they do so as if the indigenous population of the island had died out; William Philips

³⁴ Constantia Maxwell, p. 318.

³⁵ Swift, 'On Barbarous Denominations in Ireland', Corpus of Electronic Texts Ed.
< <http://celt.ucc.ie/published/E700001-006/nav.html> > [accessed 12/10/2004] (p. 346).

³⁶ Macklin, *The True-born Irishman*, II., in *Four Comedies*, p. 112.

³⁷ Letter 4, *The Drapier's Letters*, *The Portable Swift*, p. 193.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

interposes certain aristocratic converts, who form the bridge from the Golden Age to the New Hibernia, conferring continuity and legitimacy on the present Ascendants by association. The old Irish gentry reappeared, as the extent and sophistication of Gaelic culture became apparent in English translations. As the survivors of the Irish aristocracy re-established themselves, they appeared as the heirs to a desirable independent civilization, in harmony with its surroundings; the more so as the writings of Rousseau gained in influence in the second half of the century.

What the plays from the mid-century show us is a disengagement from the mother-country and an engagement with the country of adoption, at different levels. They trace the creation of the Story of 'Hibernia' and the transformation of the cultural awareness from negative to positive – from Teague to Sir Lucius O'Trigger, from cabin to the palace of Tamor, from ignorance to learning, from a picturesque savagery to a Golden Age.

The comedies are more successful as plays than the historic tragedies, which suffer dramatically by their didactic intentions and their sense of a higher purpose than a mere play. They are interesting as a resource and as a mirror to eighteenth century Ascendancy attitudes and the emergence of 'Hibernian' culture, and of the tensions within it, but none of the playwrights rises above mediocrity. The best writing is in the comedies; the best plays were written, not by the theorists, or the politicians – Dobbs, Philips, Howard – but by men who had an intimate knowledge of the stage – Macklin, the Sheridans, Goldsmith, and O'Keeffe.

Theatrically speaking, the Protestant nation of Hibernia was in two minds about itself: on the one hand it wanted to be no different from the other British people across the

water, but at the same time it wanted to differentiate itself from them, without losing status as equal. It emphasised its sameness in closely following and adopting a tried English repertoire, and by taming the rowdy, irrational elements within its audience. Unfortunately, the only way of expressing its difference was by using and displaying those same Dionysiac elements on the stage. This display was an expression of those elements in the country that the Anglo-Irish preferred to keep submerged, and while it had the qualities of an exorcism, their expression may have led to some degree of acceptance of them in themselves, and in their fellow-countrymen. The idea that the English and Irish characters put together would make a complete person was one that Edmund Burke proposed and can still be seen a hundred and fifty years later in *John Bull's Other Island*.³⁹

So that, starting from Thomas Sheridan's Captain O'Blunder in 1738, there is a line of flamboyant Irish Gentlemen in the eighteenth century drama, who express, for the English and Irish audiences, the essence of 'Hibernia'. One half of the 'Hibernian' psyche approved, and the plays containing these characters were perennially successful, but the other half was scandalised that this dramatic construct should be applied equally to all of them, and denied the veracity of this stage Irishman. It is clear, however from any account of the period, that these stage gentlemen are but a pale shadow of the real thing. Sir Lucius O'Trigger's easy belligerence, for example, is mild and relatively harmless when compared to the likes of George Robert Fitzgerald, who fought at least twelve duels in his short life, and claimed twenty six, who chained his father to a bear and imprisoned him in a cave, and was hanged for murder in 1786.⁴⁰ The Protestant Family of 'Hibernia' was reluctant to be represented by such rowdy, disreputable

³⁹ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 20.

⁴⁰ Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour*, pp. 151-157.

members, for long safely rusticated, but now breaking out afresh, like an expression of their unconscious mind.

There are now two types of theatre on display, representing the duality that was incipient in Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle* and was to inform the Irish theatre for decades, reaching its apotheosis in the dualities of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's plays. There is the conforming Protestant Ascendancy theatre, such as Thomas Sheridan imported from England, and the non-conformist Irish theatre as exemplified by Macklin and later by O'Keeffe. The conforming theatre seems to hold sway, but it is being undermined and eroded by the other strand, physically in disturbances and riots, but also in the characters that represent the nation on the stage. All of these characters come from the repressed tradition, even if the playwrights did not. What they show is the placid Augustan surface of 'Hibernian' society being cracked by the creative rowdiness of an alternative vision. When the 'Hibernians' complain of the stage Irishman, it is not because the figure portrayed is untrue, but because it is drawn mostly from the other tradition, and portrayed an image of their society that made them uncomfortable.

Most of the Irish characters in eighteenth century plays are variations on a theme: Captain O'Blunder, Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan, Major O'Flaherty, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and Lieutenant O'Connor are all created from the same archetype, but each pushes the character further. Each builds on the previous one in developing an aggregate portrait of the Irish Gentleman. In these plays, the composite Irish Gentleman that forms, the dramatic simulacrum of the race, is an Irish-Hibernian one. Dobbs, in the prologue to *The Patriot King* found this display of Irish-Hibernians too one-dimensional – 'all honest but they are all fools' – which shows he recognizes the similarities in the characters, but he misses the evolution of the overall portrait. In this picture, the Gentry

replace the Nobility on the stage, as they already have in the audience, and as they in their turn will be replaced by the lower or peasant class in the plays of O'Keeffe.

The first of the line is Thomas Sheridan's Captain O'Blunder in *The Brave Irishman*, which, while it is essentially a *miles gloriosus*, is developed well beyond the source material. He is not just the butt of the metropolitan characters, and his good nature and generous outlook bring him to success in the end. Sheridan gives him a 'bull and blunder' dialogue for the most part, but occasionally he reaches through that and we can see the shadow of something different, an Irish tendency to toy with the English language that produces unexpected results. Cumberland adds to the character a dash of Rousseau: his Major O'Flaherty is one of life's natural aristocrats from whom dull English society, frozen by manners, has a lot to learn in terms of natural feelings and spontaneous expression: this was a society in which Lord Chesterfield advised his son that there was nothing so vulgar as audible laughter. Macklin transforms the character and his speech. He gives us two creations in one of whom, Murrough O'Dogherty, the bourgeois gentility is uppermost and the other, Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan, who belongs to the dashing anarchic strain. Macklin turns the brogue into an attractive attribute, a weapon or a toy, and makes it an integral part of his Irish Gentleman. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, typically, synthesises the two lines of development, the conformist and the anarchist, in Sir Lucius O'Trigger and Lieutenant O'Connor.

The prototype was Captain O'Blunder, in *The Brave Irishman*, written by Thomas Sheridan, the manager of Smock Alley, when a young man, probably around 1738⁴¹, though the play was not published until 1755. It is a slight piece, a two-act farce, and is

⁴¹ Duggan, (p. 196), dates it to 1738; the play went through many versions, revisions, and editions. Wheatley & Donovan date it to 1755 from 'a fair copy submitted to the licenser in March, 1755, when the play was produced at Covent Garden'; Wheatley & Donovan, p. 445.

constructed out of pieces of other plays. Its ultimate ancestor is Molière; Wheatley and Donovan state that the play derives 'from the anonymous *Squire Trelooby*, an adaptation of Molière's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*.'⁴² In fact, it derives directly from Shadwell's adaptation of that play, called *The Plotting Lovers; or, The Dismal Squire*, produced at Smock Alley in 1719/20 and published in Shadwell's *Works* in 1720. The booby in that play is called Squire Trelooby and the father is called Tradewell, as in Sheridan's play. They also share a silly Frenchman who becomes entangled in the convolutions of his outrageous French accent.

Wheatley and Donovan follow Joep Leerson in claiming that Captain O'Blunder is an anti-stage-Irishman: 'It is the misrepresentation of the Irishman that is the core of the play.'⁴³ This aspect of his play Sheridan lifted from Farquhar's Roebuck in *Love and a Bottle*. The first scene of *The Brave Irishman* exactly parallels Roebuck's introduction in Farquhar's play, and the overall action of Sheridan's play re-enacts *Love and a Bottle*. In *The Brave Irishman*, the heroine begins by indulging her ignorance and fantastical ideas about Irishmen. Her prejudices are shown, by the conduct and character of the Irish hero, to be baseless, and he ends up winning her hand by behaving 'generously.' This is exactly what happens, at greater length and with a great deal more subtlety in *Love and a Bottle*, but the plays share the technique, first of expressing, and then to refuting, English prejudices about Ireland and Irishmen.

The heroine, Lucinda, in *The Brave Irishman*, has ideas about the Irish at the start of the play that she must get rid of by the end:

⁴² Wheatley & Donovan, p. 421.

⁴³ Wheatley & Donovan, p. 422.

LUCINDA Why I am told they are mere beasts, and have horns in that country.

BETTY I believe not more than their neighbours, but I assure you, our London citizens know to their cost that they have an excellent hand at planting them. Come, come Madam, it is time to lay aside these prejudices. I have known several of that country, and I assure you, they are the most charming, agreeable, delightful, companions in the world. In short, they are worth all the beaux in Christendom.⁴⁴

O'Blunder arrives in London in a state of poverty and dishevelment after a long journey that repeats Roebuck's entrance in the earlier drama. In *Love and a Bottle*, the first exchange between Roebuck and the heroine, also called Lucinda, forms the basis of the above passage in Sheridan's play:

LUCINDA Tell us some news of your country; I have heard the strangest stories, that the people wear horns and hoofs.

ROEBUCK Yes, faith, a great many wear horns; but we had that among other laudable fashions, from London.⁴⁵

As the plays progress, it becomes clear that the Irishmen, for all their initial rough appearance are, in conduct and sentiment, more gentlemen than their English counterparts. Both are proud and defensive of their own and their country's honour. O'Blunder is a gentleman as well as a soldier, like MacMorrice: 'Isn't a shauntleman a shauntleman in any part of the world?'⁴⁶ He is proudly Irish: 'I scorn to deny my country,'⁴⁷ he asserts and kicks Ragoo, when he calls it a 'Hottentot country'.⁴⁸

Although a Protestant himself, or he could not be an officer in the army, he connives at his sergeant's Catholicism, and he also appropriates Irish history and tradition. He swears by St. Patrick, and invokes the continuity of tradition for which the Anglo-Irish

⁴⁴ Thomas Sheridan, *The Brave Irishman*, I. 1, in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 421.

⁴⁵ Farquhar, *Love and a Bottle*, ed. by Charles Stonehill, in *The Complete Works of George Farquhar* (New York: Gordian Press, 1967), I. 1. p. 14.

⁴⁶ *The Brave Irishman*, I. 2. p. 429.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 2. p. 430.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I. 2. p. 432.

yearned: 'You know I have a good estate in Ireland, besides my commission, it will be enough for us all, and we'll go there, and live like so many Irish kings.'⁴⁹

Captain O'Blunder has too much 'generosity' to fall into the trap prepared for him by Cheatwell, who disseminates the report that Lucinda is now a pauper. O'Blunder confounds expectations by taking her for her own sake, not her fortune, only to find that she is rich after all. This richer/poorer theme could be taken as just a comic romantic device, were it not for the fact that Sheridan chose to make it into a political statement in the Epilogue; he advocates an ever-closer relationship between the two kingdoms, and flies in the face of the Patriot separatists:

O, would the heroes of Hibernia's blood,
Who lately in her cause uprightly stood,
But say with me they'll mix their noble breed
With Britain's daughters, then we would be freed.⁵⁰

O'Blunder is not the linguistic fool he might appear; Sheridan has given him a fair amount of malapropisms and 'Irish' blunders, but a closer look indicates a subtler undercurrent. Many of his blunders are simply oxymorons and paradoxes, but a good many could be seen as playing with the language's sounds and meanings. His remark on a horseman's expertise being a result of his being 'manured to them from the time he was seven' is a sly play on words and junction of ideas, and when he refuses to purchase gloves and says that 'my hands shall go barefoot all the days of my life', we get an adumbration of the elegant reversals of Oscar Wilde, as well as a Platonic sense that the contradiction on the surface is resolved by an agreement on an ideal level. His most extravagant blunders have a surrealist sort of meaning that ricochets around inside the sentence. O'Blunder's remark to his sergeant, for example: 'You know you have lied

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II. 3. p. 442.

⁵⁰ Duggan, p.197. (Wheatley & Donovan omit this Epilogue).

under the computation of being a papist, and so if you ever come into battle, it will be incumbered upon you to stigmatize yourself,'⁵¹ is a sophisticated piece of juggling with sound and meaning. Sheridan is showing off, but he is indicating that his audience and the character he created have a highly developed grasp of verbal play.

Macklin continues this linguistic development in Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan in *Love à la Mode* (1759) one of the most popular plays of the late eighteenth century. He repeats the dramatic situation and action of Sheridan's play, but places more emphasis on confounding the linguistic expectations of the English participants. Macklin writes terrific comedy characters, even though the action is flimsy and derivative. This was the age of the actor, and these well-written comic parts gave them opportunities that resulted in the play holding the stage well into the nineteenth century.

The heroine, Charlotte, is determined to make game of her suitors, because she knows that their motives are mercenary; they deserve to be ridiculed for it, and society will approve:

CHARLOTTE The world will applaud the mirth, especially when they know what kind of lovers they are; and that the sole motive of their addresses was the lady's fortune.⁵²

The suitors are of a wide-ranging ethnic diversity: there is a 'beau Jew' Mordecai, an English 'gentleman jockey', a 'proud, haughty Caledonian knight' and 'a wild Irish, Prussian, hard-headed soldier.'⁵³ Although she is annoyed with all of them, the Irish soldier is clearly off to a head start compared to the others, because he 'has gained the

⁵¹ *The Brave Irishman*, I. 2. p. 432.

⁵² *Love à la Mode*, I., in *Four Comedies*, p. 45.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I. p. 45.

highest esteem in his profession.'⁵⁴ So while initially tarred with the same mercenary brush as the others, he proves to be just what he seems, without guile or avarice, not a gentleman Jew, a ruined jockey, or a sneering baronet, but an honest soldier.

Love à la Mode follows the same curve of action that Sheridan's and Farquhar's plays did, but Macklin casts the plot of 'expectation defeated' into a recurring linguistic mode. Sir Archy Macsarcasm promises to his friends and to the audience a fine piece of bull and blarney from Sir Callaghan when he is asked to describe a military action: 'I'll engage he wull fight ye as many battles as Quintus Curtius, and aw in as guid meeletary Irish as ever came frai the banks of the Shannon, or the bogs of Tipperary.'⁵⁵ But Sir Callaghan delivers an account that is masterful in its clarity of perception and honest evaluation of the chaos of battle:

SIR CALLAGHAN Why, madam, there is so much doing everywhere, there is no knowing what is done anywhere; for every man has his own part to look after, which is as much as he can do, without minding what other people are about. Then, madam, there is such drumming and trumpeting, firing and smoking, fighting and rattling everywhere – and such an uproar of courage and slaughter in every man's mind – and such a delightful confusion altogether, that you can no more give an account of it than you can the stars in the sky.⁵⁶

This passage overturns the expectations of the other suitors and the audience from two points of view. First, it is clear and exact, without any Irish bulls or blarney, and delivered in standard, clear English, and so fails to make game of his brogue. Secondly, it is the opposite of the *miles gloriosus* persona that has been attached to Sir Callaghan by the other characters. Far from being a vainglorious boaster, he is a keen and exact observer, who refrains from boasting of his own martial prowess. Best of all, Macklin's dramatic skill is captured in one word, 'delightful', that catches Sir Callaghan's

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I. p. 46.

⁵⁵ *Love à la Mode*, I. *Four Comedies*, p. 54.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I. p. 55.

attraction to the violent chaos of war, to which he remains faithful throughout the play. His superiority as a suitor is implied by his superior command of language.

The pattern of linguistic challenge and victory is repeated when the other suitors hide to hear Sir Callaghan's declaration of love in a condescending expectation of linguistic chaos. But Sir Callaghan's straightforwardness confounds them again. He declares himself briefly and succinctly, but still comically, in piled-up military metaphors:

SIR CALLAGHAN

Why, look you, madam, for my part, I was never born or bred in a school of compliments, where they learn fine bows, and fine speeches; but in an academy where heads, legs, and arms, and bullets dance country dances without the owners' leave – just as the fortune of war directs. Therefore, madam, all that I can say to you is, that your eyes have made me a prisoner of war, that Cupid has made a garrison of my heart, and keeps me to devilish hard duty; and if you don't relieve me, I shall be a dead man before I come to action.⁵⁷

The other three suitors dismally fail the test for greed that has been devised by Charlotte's uncle, but Sir Callaghan passes by proving that he has a 'generous heart'.⁵⁸ He is an Irish Gentleman, and the acquisition of wealth, so avidly pursued by the other suitors, means little to him. The desire for a fortune is not simple acquisitiveness, gambling, or to bolster family pride, but 'to maintain a couple of honest hearts, and have something to spare for the necessities of a friend, which is all we want, and all that fortune is good for.'⁵⁹

Sir Callaghan grows in stature as he overcomes each challenge. His language is always clear, but with an occasional idiomatic word or phrase, such as 'ax my lave'⁶⁰, or

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 69.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 76.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 75.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 77.

'poltroon'.⁶¹ As in the previous play, as well as outclassing the other suitors in personal courage and manliness, Macklin has the Irishman outshine them linguistically.

If the 'Hibernians' are divided between the dull, bourgeois English-Irish and the vibrant, convert Gaelic-Irish, one supplying the lack in the other, then the superior dramatic potential of characters who speak, act and live vividly, over the virtues of conformity and dullness, is obvious enough. This was the aspect that was latched on to by Richard Cumberland in his play *The West Indian* of 1771. Cumberland was a fine playwright, whose father was the Bishop of Clonfert and Kilmore and who spent some time in Dublin as Under Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant, so we may assume that he draws on his experience to create the colourful character of Major O'Flaherty, in this, his best-known play.

Major O'Flaherty is one of the Wild Geese, who has fought all over Europe as a mercenary; he is described in the prologue as 'A brave, unthinking, animated rogue, /With here and there a touch upon the brogue'.⁶² This tells us how the playwright regarded the character, but it also tells us how it is to be played, in normal speech, but with occasional touches of the brogue for added colour, effect, or humour.

The Major gives his own colourful history, in clear, plain English:

MAJOR 'Tis thirty years, come the time, that I have followed the trade, and in a pretty many countries. Let me see – In the war before last I served in the Irish brigade, d'ye see; there, after bringing off the French monarch, I left his service, with a British bullet in my body, and this ribband in my button-hole. Last war I followed the fortunes of

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 71.

⁶² Richard Cumberland, Prologue to *The West Indian*, in *'The Beggar's Opera' and Other Eighteenth Century Plays*, ed. by John Hampden & David W Lindsay (London: JM Dent, 1974; first publ. Everyman's Library, 1928), p. 343.

the German eagle, in the corps of grenadiers; there I had my belly full of fighting, and a plentiful scarcity of everything else. After six and twenty engagements, great and small, I went off, with this gash in my skull, and kiss of the Empress' sweet hand (Heaven bless it) for my pains. Since the peace, my dear, I took a little turn with the Confederates there in Poland – and such a set of madcaps! – by the Lord Harry, I never knew what it was they were scuffling about.⁶³

The Major's affability and benevolence are mirrored by the other colonial in the play, Belcour, the West Indian of the title. Cumberland gives a positive aspect to the West Indian and the Irish, and contrasts them favourably with the colder English characters. The colonials are spontaneous, generous, good-hearted, and easy-going, the English are buttoned-up and calculating. Even the heroines are obsessed with the notion of 'fortune', and incapable of acting openly or open-handedly. Like Roebuck, Major O'Flaherty reacts instinctively, and his instincts are always sound, just as Belcour's are, even though his actions are comically impulsive and beyond what a rigidly ordered society finds acceptable. Both enrich society by their warmth and directness, but they lack the curbs that mannered society expects. Their education has not fitted them for London drawing-rooms, but it is precisely that lack of that education that enables them to circumvent the standards and format of society and cut through its rituals and forms. Their natural characters are genteel, and their education – O'Flaherty's cosmopolitanism, and Belcour's ascendancy in a servile, slave-owning society – actually places them above the ritualised norms of London, an eminence which the hero, young Dudley, cannot achieve on account of his formal indoctrination by English society. Just like Boucicault's heroes a century later, Dudley is trapped in the rituals, and cannot break out even with the active encouragement of Charlotte, the heroine; a solution has to be engineered, without his participation, which enables him to stay within the bounds of society.

⁶³ *Love à la Mode*, II. 7. p. 363.

The play turns on a concealed will that the Major takes from a shady lawyer by force without thinking about the consequences. He sees it is the right thing to do and does it; dishonourable actions are not within his comprehension. The lawyer, Varland, insults him in return, but the Major rebuts him as an Irishman and a soldier:

VARLAND: Well you have got the paper; if you are an honest
man, give it to Charley Dudley.
MAJOR: An honest man! Look at me, friend: I am a soldier,
this is not the livery of a knave; I am an Irishman, honey; mine
is not the country of dishonour.⁶⁴

Belcour is a creature of a hot climate, hot-blooded and hot-headed. Both he and Major O'Flaherty behave impeccably according to their own lights; they each have their own special codes of honour, but these are perceived as wrong in the colder, more staid English society and climate.

BELCOUR: Ah, sir, mine is a case wherein you and I shall
never think alike; the punctilious rules by which I am
bound are not to be found in your ledgers, nor will pass
current in the compting-house of a trader.⁶⁵

Cumberland shows that the English have much to learn from their colonial visitors in terms of directness and spontaneity in a society that has become ossified in manners, but the colonials, especially the West Indian, need to learn a modicum of control. Belcour himself, in a passion of frustration, says:

Why did I ever quit the soil in which I grew; what evil planet drew me from
that warm sunny region, where naked nature walks without disguise, into
this cold contriving artificial country?⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, IV. 9. p. 392.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, IV. 10. p. 393.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, IV. 10. p. 392.

The English come to appreciate the colonials: 'I have discovered through a veil of some irregularities,' admits Belcour's uncle, 'a heart beating with benevolence, an animated nature.'⁶⁷ The play displays the influence of Voltaire in its feeling of optimism and benevolence, that things will turn out for the best. The overt aristocrats, the Rusports and Dudleys, one rich and one poor, are set to rights by the benevolence, generosity and directness of Belcour and O'Flaherty, the natural aristocrats from the colonies.

The internal opposition that is captured within these Irish characters, between their mercenary brains and the quixotic gallantry of their hearts, is repeated in the comparable tension that is articulated between them and the society that spawned them. They are all outcasts from that society, removed from it spiritually as well as spatially, yet retain a strong emotional attachment. This duality reaches its highest expression in the work of Oliver Goldsmith and Thomas Sheridan's son, Richard Brinsley. Though none of their plays are set in Ireland, the idea of alternative selves is almost a commonplace in them. Goldsmith's hero and heroine, Marlow and Kate Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer* assume other personas to become acquainted. In Sheridan's *The Rivals*, Captain Absolute has to play two versions of himself, and *The School for Scandal* displays a pair of complementary brothers, Charles and Joseph Surface. In *St. Patrick's Day*, Lieutenant O'Connor has to assume several different roles in order to achieve his ends.

The comedy in *The Rivals* takes after Wycherley's *The Country Wife* in its plot of out-of-towners out of their depths in an urban society, caught between two standards of behaviour and morality. The English Acres is more at sea, however, than the Irish Sir Lucius O'Trigger, who follows his own eccentric code, but is still accepted in Bath society. It is possible that Sheridan is revisiting his own experience in English society

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, V. 8. p. 405.

and indicating the way outsiders find, or don't find, their way through it. Katharine Worth speaks of a duality that is evident in Sheridan's life and also finds its way into his work.⁶⁸ It is manifested here in the Beverley/Absolute deception; and Sheridan revisited it in *School for Scandal*. That play has the two opposing sides of a single nature, expressed by the two brothers; in *The Rivals* it is the same actor playing two aspects of the same character, one sober, one scapegrace, but further complicated by the character of Faulkland who embodies the paralysing jealousy that Sheridan felt when in pursuit of his wife.⁶⁹ The idea of playacting is as old as comedy – the adopting of a different role to reveal some essential but hidden ingredient of the true self – but there does seem to be some intimate connection between the idea of playacting and the Anglo-Irish. It stems from some deep-rooted uncertainty as to their inherent nature and their position in Ireland, and within the extended English, or British, family. Neither Captain Absolute nor Sir Anthony are given any distinctively Irish identity, but could as easily be Irish as not. It is in his play-acting and cunning stratagems that the Captain tends to Irishness. Katherine Worth writes of Sheridan himself: 'It is no accident that his comedies often celebrate the exploits of dashing adventurers, who win their way against the odds with the aid of their quick wits, histrionic abilities, and powers of persuasion.'⁷⁰ This dashing Irish persona, however, with the exception of Lieutenant O'Connor, is usually conferred by Sheridan on characters that are nominally English.

Sir Lucius O'Trigger is a dashing adventurer, but belongs, ultimately, more to the bourgeois than the mercurial tendency; he is totally set in his code of honour and conduct, rather than being quick-witted, histrionic, and inventive. He is not, however, the

⁶⁸ Katharine Worth, *Sheridan and Goldsmith*, English Dramatists Series (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 9-24.

⁶⁹ Madeleine Bingham, *Sheridan, The Track of a Comet* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972): 'The comedy of *The Rivals* was the love affair of Sheridan and Eliza. Lydia and Julia were both Eliza, as Jack Absolute and Faulkland are both Sheridan himself. By splitting the characters down the middle Sheridan, with great skill, managed to put all the aspects of his love affair into four characters.' p.114.

⁷⁰ Worth, *Sheridan and Goldsmith*, p. 24.

stage-Irish horror one might expect. He is genteel, with his own code of conduct and sense of humour. His social standing is never in doubt, even though he has lost his estate: 'The mansion-house and dirty acres have slipped through my fingers.'⁷¹ He is in Bath to pursue the time-honoured Irish sport of pursuing heiresses. His appearance and conduct is calculated to please the ladies. Lucy has got three crowns, two gold pocket-pieces, and a silver snuff box from him, and notes how generous he is, in both senses of the word: 'Though not over-rich, I found he had too much pride and delicacy to sacrifice the feelings of a gentleman to the necessities of his fortunes.'⁷² His code of honour calls for gallantry: '*Modesty!* – is a quality in a lover more praised by the women than liked.'⁷³ But as a gentleman, he wants everything done fairly to get the old gentlewoman's consent.⁷⁴ He is the antithesis of the scheming Absolute, whose comic chaos belongs more to the Irish tradition of creative anarchy. Sir Lucius says he is too poor to scheme; if he was rich he could run off with a rich woman and get away with it, but a poor man is forced to be honest: 'I am so poor, that I can't afford to do a dirty action. – if I did not want money, I'd steal your mistress and her fortune with a great deal of pleasure.'⁷⁵ To cozen an heiress would be a dishonourable thing to do, even though all Sir Lucius has left, like Charles Surface, is 'our honour and the family pictures'.⁷⁶ His honour is his fortune, and he lives by a very strict, if comic, standard: 'What the devil signifies *right* when your honour is concerned?'⁷⁷ But he is no fire-eater: 'Come, come, there must be no passion at all in the case – these things should always be done civilly.'⁷⁸ He tells Acres how to put a challenge: 'Remember now, when you meet your antagonist, do everything in a mild and agreeable manner – Let your courage be as keen, but at the

⁷¹ *The Rivals*, III. 5. 100.

⁷² *Ibid.*, I. 2. 340.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II. 2. 73.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, II. 2. 59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, II. 2. 63.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 4. 102.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, III. 4. 87.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, III. 4. 110.

same time as polished, as your sword.'⁷⁹ He deals with such duels and killing as routine, as a game, as a purging of misunderstanding, after which good feeling and friendship is restored: 'You see how this little explanation will put a stop at once to all confusion or misunderstanding that might arise between you.'⁸⁰ He is the defender of his country's honour as well as his own; he sees no gap between the two: 'There is a gay captain here, who put a jest on me lately, at the expense of my country, and I only want to fall in with the gentleman to call him out.'⁸¹

In his characterisation of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Sheridan plays with the template established by his father, Macklin, and Cumberland, and expertly inverts it. Unlike the others, Sir Lucius is affable on the surface, but lethal at heart: he talks charmingly, and seems the soul of reasonableness. The comedy lies in realizing that his charm and reasonableness are all directed towards homicide. It is this discrepancy that is funny, the pitting of manner against matter. Sir Lucius is an aesthete of violence, but he is perfectly good-natured. He is more complex than his predecessors in his connoisseurship of violence and the code of honour, which inform his every action. What Sheridan adds to the archetype is the marriage of easy fellowship and lethal violence: Sir Lucius will kill or be killed with the best will in the world, and without rancour or complaint, as long as it is done 'prettily' He develops Macklin's interest in language by making the character no longer linguistically naïve, but giving him perfectly normal English while appreciating deviant linguistic registers: he recognizes that the blunderings of the Irish 'brogue' have been shunted sideways and given to Mrs. Malaprop. He takes an Irish delight in her use of language:

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, III. 4. 160.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, III. 4. 138.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, III. 4. 150.

Lucy, your lady is a great mistress of language. Faith, she's quite the queen of the dictionary! –for the devil a word dare refuse coming at her call – though one would think it was quite out of hearing.⁸²

Sir Lucius' boisterous benignity is quite attractive. Can a gentleman never fight in peace and quiet? he asks, and he thrives on this paradox. He is the soul of good breeding and goodwill who 'begged leave to have the pleasure of cutting my throat.'⁸³ He has an offhand fatalism and disregard for danger which may be called courage, but he is more concerned with staying a gentleman than staying alive – acting always like a gentleman is a priority, staying alive is a side-issue. The distance between the duellists is not calculated to save your life but to save face: 'There now, that is a very pretty distance – a pretty gentleman's distance.'⁸⁴ 'Prettiness' is a term one would not normally apply to a duel but he takes a connoisseur's delight in it. He is so used to risking his life he thinks nothing of it: 'There's nothing like being used to a thing.'⁸⁵ He has a cheerful fatalism about the outcome. He says to Acres: 'would you choose to be pickled and sent home? – or would it be the same to you to lie here in the Abbey? – I'm told there is snug lying in the Abbey.'⁸⁶

Sir Lucius' experience has taught him that duels are seldom fatal, something that the others don't know, and this makes him philosophical. A persistent theme of the play is that men, their honour and their duels, are ridiculous; Sheridan may be remembering his own brush with duelling in which he was seriously injured, and he is certainly alluding to the Irish predilection for them. Sir Lucius supplies most of the comedy on this issue by his unblinking acceptance of the code, his complete absence of irony or doubt, and the intense goodwill and good manners with which he tries to kill his opponents. There

⁸² *Ibid.*, II. 2. 44.

⁸³ *Ibid.* IV. 3. 87.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* V. 3. 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, V. 3. 43.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, V. 3. 36.

is nothing at all personal in it, no animosity; if someone else turns up to fight, that will do equally well:

You have certainly challenged somebody- and you came here to fight him- Now, if that gentleman is willing to represent him- I can't see, for my soul, why it isn't just the same thing.⁸⁷

Such rigidity and punctiliousness inevitably tie him in a knot of his own making. Sir Lucius accepts Absolute's apology with a good grace, as real, because it is couched and delivered in proper form and with a proper gentlemanly address. Absolute says: 'As I should not fear to support a real injury – you shall now see that I am not ashamed to atone for an inadvertency – I ask your pardon.'⁸⁸ Though it is an apology for something that never happened, as was the reason for the proposed duel, Sir Lucius accepts the apology: 'an affront handsomely acknowledged becomes an obligation.'⁸⁹ The handsome acknowledgement gives it complete reality to Sir Lucius, so he is now in the absurd position of being put under an obligation by an apology for an incident that never occurred, and that he invented himself. Reality lies in the style, not the substance; it is possible to glimpse here a shadowy ancestor of *The Playboy of the Western World*.

Sheridan's other overtly Irish character is Lieutenant O'Connor in *St. Patrick's Day* (1775). Worth sees Lieutenant O'Connor as Sheridan making amends 'for any unwitting slight he had put upon the nation in the characterisation of Sir Lucius O'Trigger.'⁹⁰ but it was gratitude to Clinch, who rescued *The Rivals* by his more sympathetic playing of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, that motivated him to write this short farce for the actor's benefit night.⁹¹ O'Connor is an extremely attractive character, quick-witted, resourceful, full of

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, V. 3. 130.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, V. 3. 220.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, V. 3. 230.

⁹⁰ Worth, p. 26.

⁹¹ Fintan O'Toole, *The Traitor's Kiss: The Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, (London: Granta, 1998) p.101.

'disguisings, cheatings, and ingenious improvisations.'⁹² The piece romps along at a hectic pace, driven by the machinations of O'Connor in trying to outwit his sweetheart's father. *St. Patrick's Day* has its origins in the *Commedia dell' Arte*, with the deceived father, *la fille mal gardée*, the crafty disguised suitor, and the doctor, the whole mixed with an subverted archetype of the *Miles Gloriosus* in the character of Lieutenant O'Connor. Another source is Molière's *La Malade Imaginaire* in which the lover disguises himself as a doctor in order to treat the deceived father and gain admittance to the heroine. Sheridan excelled in this sort of collage; it could be said that this is his favoured method of creation. His plays and characters can all be traced to previous writers and his genius lies in rethinking and redeploying them. His knowledge of old plays seems to have been immense, - he had the reputation of being 'deep read in the whole catalogue of forgotten farces'⁹³ - but he excuses himself from any charge of plagiarism in his introduction to *The Rivals*:

On subjects on which the mind has been informed, invention is slow of exerting itself. Faded ideas float in the fancy like half-forgotten dreams; and the imagination in its fullest enjoyments becomes suspicious of its offspring and doubts whether it has created or adopted.⁹⁴

The play begins with O'Connor bestowing money on his men to celebrate the day and drink St. Patrick's health, and ends with the resourceful Irish Gentleman successful, having outsmarted Justice Credulous and forced him to accept him both as a soldier and an Irishman. Lieutenant O'Connor is a different take on the character of the Irish gentleman soldier, but one that shows the quicksilver nature of the Irish channelled into histrionic extravagance. Sheridan may not be making amends for Sir Lucius, but he has assembled Lieutenant O'Connor from the bits left over. Where Sir Lucius is obsessed

⁹² Worth, *Goldsmith and Sheridan*, p. 109.

⁹³ Introduction to *Sheridan's Plays*, ed. by Cecil Price (Oxford: University Press, 1975), p. xiv.

⁹⁴ Sheridan's Preface to *The Rivals*, p. xxvii.

with one mode of conduct, O'Connor is devious and resourceful; where Sir Lucius is open and straight, O'Connor is deceitful and cunning; where O'Trigger relies on the threat of violence, the Lieutenant relies on his wits; where Sir Lucius is aware of the world through the filter of his own needs, O'Connor is aware of those for whom he has responsibility. The pieces of the character of the Irish Gentleman are shared between them. Sir Lucius doesn't succeed in winning the heroine, but behaves with perfect 'generosity' and gentlemanliness about it: he is sporting in his defeat, and free from rancour: 'As I have been disappointed myself, it will be very hard if I have not the satisfaction of seeing other people succeed better.'⁹⁵ At basis, he shows a completely bourgeois conformity, while Lieutenant O'Connor is resourceful, clever, adroit in knowing when to retreat and mount another attack from a different quarter. He is clearly a man of birth and breeding, as shown by his rank, and the deference of the other Irishmen that he commands. The corporal says of him: 'I never will see a sweeter timpir'd officer, nor one more free with his purse,'⁹⁶ such generosity being a mark of the Irish aristocracy. Everybody agrees about his good nature, and his only fault is a small one: the Serjeant says: 'the lad is good-natur'd at bottom - so I pass over small things - but hearkee, between ourselves - he is confoundedly given to wenching,'⁹⁷ which is not a fault at all in Irish heroes but a sign of virility. He is as proud of being Irish as of being a soldier. In the first scene the Corporal says of him: 'I put a great Shambroque in his hat this Morning, and I'll be bound for him he'll wear it, if it was as big as Stephen's Green.'⁹⁸ At the end of the play when the Justice asks him to 'Forswear your Country, and quit the Army - and I'll receive you as my Son in law,'⁹⁹ he is outraged at the notion

⁹⁵*The Rivals*, V. 3. 288.

⁹⁶*St. Patrick's Day*, I. 1. 9.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, II. 2. 60.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, I. 1. 10.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, II. 4. 200.

of doing either: 'I'd pull your nose for mentioning the first, and break your bones for proposing the latter.'¹⁰⁰

While the play hums with patriotic symbolism, of shamrocks, St. Patrick, St. Patrick's Day, and almost begs to begin or end, (or both), with the tune of the same name that had become the unofficial anthem of 'Hibernia', Lieutenant O'Connor, like Sir Lucius, remains the outsider in terms of acceptance in this society by refusing to renounce his country or his profession; but the play also reaches towards the inclusion of the Irish within the British family in the final acceptance of the Lieutenant on his own terms by Justice Credulous.

The anarchy of the Gaelic influence, and the settled love of order on the English side combine to produce the humours of 'Hibernia'. The younger Sheridan, in his two best known plays, *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* splits the two sides of the character into Captain Absolute and 'Ensign Beverley', and Charles and Joseph Surface. Cumberland, Thomas Sheridan and Macklin all had their heroes triumph by the innate superiority rather than their anarchic surface; Cumberland openly acknowledges that the colonial character has not become atrophied by a rigid code of manners, that it retains the vital spark of nature. Richard Brinsley Sheridan has Lieutenant O'Connor succeed by combining his generous nature with his quick wits and willingness to cheat his way around the strictures of society, using anarchy in a creative, constructive manner, in order to achieve harmony, while Sir Lucius follows his own code of conduct regardless of where he finds himself, spreading anarchy while himself in the grip of a rigid code of manners. All of the Irish characters are out of step with their society or surroundings, but they are all on the move, socially, forcing their way up the social ladder into the inner

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, II. 4. 205.

sanctum of British or English society, which was a route that Sheridan, Goldsmith, and Macklin all successfully negotiated.

Charles Macklin was a playwright whose life took such a steep upward curve. In his life he achieved a drastic racial and class change, managed to hold simultaneously the status of insider and outsider, and keep this Irish duality permanently in balance. He lived to a great age, given variously as ninety-nine and a hundred and seven, and had a successful career as an actor, manager, playwright and lecturer on the theatre. He was born Cathal MacLochlainn in County Donegal about 1690, to an Irish-speaking Catholic peasant family, but after a time spent in Dublin, working in Trinity College as an errand boy, and probably learning English, he ran away to England, changed his name to Charles Macklin, and recast himself as an offspring of landed Protestant gentry. Success followed rapidly. He was an exceptional actor, and by his early thirties he had conquered the London stage. He wrote successful plays and became the friend of Burke, Garrick, Fielding and Pope. As a playwright, he started the mode of writing parts for himself that mirrored his own personality and suited his acting: he was a man of violent opinions, with a quick temper, and a sarcastic tongue. The best parts he wrote for himself – Sir Archy MacSarcasm, Sir Pertinax MacSycophant, Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan, and Murrough O'Dogherty – all draw on these qualities. He played leading parts in his own works, but his acting had a wider influence: he was the first to perform Macbeth in Scottish dress, and his performance of Shylock rescued the part from farce and imbued it with a humanity and tragedy that resonates to this day. Pope is reputed to have said of his playing: 'This was the Jew that Shakespeare drew.'¹⁰¹ He also was one of the founders of the study of English literature: during an unsuccessful period

¹⁰¹ Justin McCarthy ascribes the quote to 'a gentleman in the pit', in *Irish Literature*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1904)

<http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/htm/pgil_datasets/authors/m/Macklin.C/refs.htm> [accessed 02/11/2004] (page 1 of 4).

in the theatre in 1753, he abandoned the stage and set up a literary tavern, for ladies and gentlemen, in Covent Garden, at which he provided lectures on the theatre, especially on Shakespeare.

His life and career were an extraordinary piece of typically Irish personal restructuring, of remaking oneself in another image, of becoming a gentleman by force of will. Brian Friel writes of him with muted admiration:

The desire to metamorphose oneself [...] secretly excites most people at some stage [...] Cathal MacLochlainn, the eighteenth century actor and playwright [...] set about it with calculation and precocious acumen while he was still only a boy and [...] almost pulled it off.¹⁰²

In fact he pulled it off spectacularly well, but having remade himself from a Catholic peasant to a landed Protestant, he was reluctant to extend a transformational licence to others. Count Mushroom, in *The True Born Irishman*, for example, is lampooned as being the son of a pawnbroker, and all the company at Bath in *The Man of the World* is satirised for having notions above its station. Perhaps it was because they were less successful than he at obliterating the track of their rise. Macklin himself, as well as all those characters that he draws with such ambiguous snobbery, is in the familiar line of false gentry, of sham nobility. His attitude to them is, as you would expect, mixed. On the one hand, he displays an egalitarian disdain for the society he finds himself in and for the upper reaches of society to which he himself is denied entrance. But he is acutely aware, as a writer and performer, of the comic potential of the social climbers, the sham nobility and the false gentry.

¹⁰² Brien Friel, preface to *The London Vertigo* (Oldcastle Co. Meath: The Gallery Press, 1990), p. 9.

Macklin's plays are inflexibly anti-establishment: in *Love à la Mode* (1759) and *The True-born Irishman* (1761), the underground gentry – O'Brallaghan and O'Dogherty – have come to the surface, but show no interest in climbing higher. There is a definite suggestion that to do so would be to betray themselves, their names and their roots. They are rooted in their Irishness, and have no need to purloin a history or invent a story to legitimize themselves. They are already 'of the race' and 'in the line' of ancient Irish nobility. O'Dogherty, for example, refuses his wife's passionate pleading for a title, rejoicing instead in the ancient and noble name of O'Dogherty.

Religion is hardly mentioned in Macklin's plays, but Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan had to go to Prussia to join the army, which implies Catholicism, and O'Dogherty is a middleman, but a Protestant, because he sat in Parliament. O'Dogherty eschews political activity and is an early advocate of the Arthur Young/ Edgeworth school of economic patriotism, much as Swift was; he even echoes Swift on the patriotic excellence of making a blade of corn grow where none grew before.¹⁰³ These sentiments ring as Macklin's own because they recur powerfully in his other plays; he detested the venality of politicians, and the hypocritical self-interest of patriots. These ideas are expressed with tremendous force and vigour; this must be how he acted: he lacks the grace and charm of Goldsmith or Richard Brinsley Sheridan, but he makes up for it in the strength and ardour of his dialogue and characters. His plotting is clever, his characters are lively, some exceptional. His last play, *The Man of the World*, is a *tour-de-force*. Unusually, it observes the unities; it is set in one room, and passes in real time. The main character, Sir Pertinax MacSycophant is an excellent portrait of a corrupt politician and chauvinist Scotsman. Macklin disliked the Scots even more than he detested politicians: there is another snobbish Scot in *Love à la Mode*, whose genealogical boasting is punctured by

¹⁰³ *The True-born Irishman*, I. in *Four Comedies*. p. 87.

Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan.¹⁰⁴ Macklin is holding up the activities of the Scots as a negative example for his fellow-countrymen; in the event of a Union, he says, this is what they should not do. But in the event of the Union, it was exactly what they did. The Union between Scotland and England took place in the reign of Queen Anne in 1707. The Scottish parliament was abolished, and Scottish MPs took their places at Westminster, where they formed themselves into a cabal to serve their collective interest and called in patriotism. Macklin found that his loathing of venal politicians and of hypocritical patriotic self-interest could be combined in a detestation of the Scots.

He had articulated the critique of politics that is central to *The Man of the World* (1781) twenty years earlier in *True-born Irishman*, but had confined it to an Irish context. He wrote the play at a time when the endemic corruption of the Irish parliament of George II had reached epic heights. The Irish parliament collapsed only at the king's death, and this one had been in existence for thirty-four years, since 1727. The power of the Undertakers and Lords Justices was largely unrestrained, the creation of boroughs, peerages and sinecures to manipulate parliament was an open and unremarked scandal, dismissed as so universal as to be harmless:

SIR PERTINAX What single instance can ye, or ainy mon, gi' of the poleetecal vice or corruption of these days, that has na been practised in the greatest states, and in the maist virtuous times? [...] It is na decent till find fault wi' what is winked at by the whole nation – nay, and practised by aw parties.¹⁰⁵

Macklin's contempt for the Irish political system extends to the class that creates and maintains it. He does not pillory the 'Hibernians' directly, at first, in *The True-born*

¹⁰⁴ SIR CALLAGHAN 'The Scots are all Irishmen's bastards, [...] for the youngest branch of our family, one Fergus O'Brallaghan was the very man that went from Carrickfergus, and peopled all Scotland with his own hands.' *Love à la Mode*, I. in *Four Comedies*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁵ *The Man of the World*, IV. p. 251 & p. 252.

Irishman, but obliquely through the persona of Count Mushroom, who is an Englishman, the jumped up son of a pawnbroker, and one of the 'most conceited impudent coxcombs that has ever yet been imported into this land.'¹⁰⁶ He is a sudden, overnight growth and O'Dogherty speaks for the older gentry when he tells him: 'You will find a great many relations here, count; for we have a large crop of Mushrooms in this here country.'¹⁰⁷ What all Macklin's main characters share is contempt for those placed above them socially; these characters are all self-portraits to some extent: they embody his opinionated, censorious, sarcastic nature, and they are all self-made men: Sir Pertinax is a professional politician, Sir Callaghan a mercenary in the Prussian service, Murrough O'Dogherty an improving Middleman and Head Tenant. They, like Macklin, have all struggled and remade themselves in another shape, and are happy enough to hold that shape. O'Dogherty, in particular, has retaken in practical terms the family position of landed eminence, and stands on his own genealogy as a true-born Irishman, not some English mushroom. Macklin continues the renovation of the great Irish families that was started by Philips; he may have stolen a Protestant landed-gentry persona, but he retains in this and his other plays a native Irish outlook and pride in his origins. This play states openly that the real gentlemen are the O'Doghertys and their like, and the shams are the mushrooms, the New 'Hibernians' that sprang up overnight. The first part of this proposition follows from Philips, but the latter part leads directly from the whole body of Irish literature of the period, of which he would have been aware, as a native Irish speaker; he may have been Charles Macklin publicly, but in private he was still Charley McLaughlin.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ O'Dogherty, *True-born Irishman*, I. p. 90.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁸ Helen M. Burke quotes Macklin's biographer Kirkman's assertion that Macklin's landlady in London was confused by his countrymen inquiring for Charley McLaughlin: Burke, p. 258.

Justin McCarthy, ed. *Irish Literature* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1904) cites the story that, during an argument, when Dr. Johnson fired off a salvo of Greek, Macklin flattened him with a volley of Irish:

<http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/htm/pgil_datasets/authors/m/Macklin,C/refs.htm>, [accessed 28/09/2004] (page 1 of 3).

The True-born Irishman draws on linguistic variants to make its point; the brogue has been rethought. Macklin obviously had a very good ear, and was, like Shaw, interested in different modes and registers of speech as class and racial indicators. He transformed his own speech in order to play non-Irish parts on the English stage, taking classical roles with the likes of Garrick. He is particularly astute on the Scottish accent, which he writes phonetically in *Love à la Mode* and *The Man of the World*, but apart from an occasional phonetic marker, such as 'Orra', or 'faith', the speech of the Irish characters is written in plain English, though with a distinct Irish rhythm and cadence. The Irish have staged a reverse colonisation of the English language, and mastered it to such an extent that the speech of English Ireland is claimed by Macklin to be superior to the other variants on display. Different kinds of English are presented, in Mrs. Diggerty's infection of cockney, and the affected braying of the English ruling class in Count Mushroom. They both suffer from comparison with the solid English of O'Dogherty and his brother-in-law Hamilton, both of whom, we may allow, spoke with an Irish accent, but without a bull or blarney in sight. Turning the familiar English slur on the Irish brogue back on its perpetrators is a favourite gambit of Macklin's: the Scots, the county English, the Gentry, the Londoners, all speak with their own particular 'brogue', but the way the Irish speak is superior to any of them:

O'DOGHERTY But let me have our own good, plain, old Irish English, which I insist is better than all the English English that ever coquettes and coxcombs brought into the land.¹⁰⁹

The characters in *Love à la Mode* had their expectations of an Irishman's language and behaviour in England exposed and ridiculed; in *The True-born Irishman* Count

¹⁰⁹ *The True-born Irishman*, II. p. 111.

Mushroom's language and behaviour as an Englishman in Ireland is lampooned, as is his expectation of Irish people's behaviour at home:

MUSHROOM You are a little odd in this here country in some points [...] however, upon the whole, take you altogether, you are a damn'ed honest, tory rory, rantum scantum, dancing, singing, laughing, boozing, jolly, friendly, fighting, hospitable people, and I like you mightily.

COUNSELLER Upon my word, sir, the people of Ireland are much obliged to you for your helter skelter, rantum scantum portrait of them.¹¹⁰

All Macklin's comedies apart from this one have been set in England, most featuring Irish characters, but Macklin in this play reverses that pattern, sets his play in Dublin, peoples it with Irish characters, and sets an Englishman, Count Mushroom as the outsider in this society.

The character of Count Mushroom is based on the fops of Restoration comedy, but Macklin's mockery of him has a keener, racial edge. First of all, the wags of Dublin have bestowed the mocking title of 'Count' on him, being well aware of his humble origins, and the title itself, which doesn't exist in the English or Irish peerage, is the one which the Anglo-Irish jeered at in the Irish Diaspora, and with which the Protestant pamphleteers branded the unquiet Gentlemen of Connaught. Macklin here turns it back on an upper-class English idiot, ignorant and patronising, loud and unselfconscious. Apart from the intensely local character of the play, the character and treatment of Mushroom was the reason for its disastrous failure on the English stage, where it was removed after one night, and Macklin apologised to the audience, observing that 'there is a geography in humour, as well as in morals.'¹¹¹ In his linking of humour, geography and morality, he is referring to behaviour: what is risible in one society is a scandal in

¹¹⁰ *The True-born Irishman*, I. p. 92.

¹¹¹ Bartley, intro. to *Four Comedies*, p. 4.

another. Yet humour moved easily from London to Dublin, why did it not travel the other way? The concern of the play, that it is ridiculous to ape the behaviour of one society in another because of a perceived cultural superiority, is at one level uncontroversial. But where the culture aped and rejected is that of the audience, the message, however comic, can be seen as an insult. The message that London society is inferior to Dublin, that it is effete and silly, whereas Dublin is solid and robust, that middle-class Dublin has nothing to learn from aristocratic London, was not well received at Drury Lane. The representative and touchstone of London culture, Count Mushroom, is shown as a prancing, lecherous fool, in a characterisation that is in its way very subversive, even though in the line of Restoration fops like the perennially popular Sir Fopling Flutter, through whom the intrusion of French culture in English society is pilloried. But with Count Mushroom the shoe is on the other foot, and the London audience was not prepared to accept that the extrusion of English culture into Irish society was just as ridiculous, though the Irish audience accepted it wholeheartedly. An English audience, even a middle-class one, would not accept Anglicisation treated as buffoonery in an Irish context, in an Irish play, by an Irish author, even within the framework of a subversive middle-class take on the English Gentry.

Macklin in this play exposes English prejudices and takes revenge on the English perception of Irish speech as full of inaccuracies by ridiculing their inability to pronounce Irish names – O'Dogherty becomes Diggerty – just as great play had been made of their failure with Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan's name. The 'new language' that Mrs. Diggerty has brought back with her, a type of mongrel cockney, is a pathetic attempt at linguistic and cultural colonisation, which is resisted by a robustly articulate Irish society. Language is not innocent, nor is 'denomination' neutral: it is a cultural

annexation, as Swift was aware and Brian Friel demonstrates in *Translations*.¹¹² There is an alchemy in naming: O'Dogherty, to his despair, finds his wife, on her return from London, a different woman:

O'DOGHERTY She is no longer the plain, modest, good-natured,
 domestic, obedient Irish Mrs. O'Dogherty, but the travelled,
 rampant, high-lifed, prancing English Mrs. Diggerty.¹¹³

She is possessed by the colonial dementia: it is a 'fit,' a 'delirium', a 'vertigo', a 'phrenzy', and a 'madness';¹¹⁴ it manifests itself linguistically, in a mangling of vowels and syntax, and when it is purged, she reverts to her own name, character and language:

O'DOGHERTY And as to yourself, my dear Nancy, I hope I shall have
 no more of your London English; none of your this here's, your
 that there's, your winegars, your weals, your vendors, your
 toastesses, and your stone postesses; but let me have our own
 good, plain, old Irish English, which I insist is better than all the
 English English that ever coquets and coxcombs brought into the
 land.

MRS. DIGGERTY I will get rid of these as fast as possible.

O'DOGHERTY And pray, above all things, never call me Mr. Diggerty my
 name is Murrough O'Dogherty, and I am not ashamed of it; but that
 damned name Diggerty always vexes me whenever I hear it.¹¹⁵

O'Dogherty throws out the anglicized names and language, with their attendant signifiers of Irish inferiority, foreign food, and easy metropolitan attitudes to adultery. O'Dogherty is a defining character for the Irish stage. Since the work of Shadwell, he is the first contemporary Irishman to appear on the Irish stage in a play by an Irish author set in Ireland. Such plays and characters are very rare. He is in the direct line of Sir Patrick Worthy in *Irish Hospitality* and Sir Francis Feignyouth in *St. Stephen's Green*, both of whom were attached to the welfare and reputation of their country. O'Dogherty,

¹¹² Swift on the retention of Irish place names: 'I am deceived, if anything has contributed to prevent the Irish from being tamed, than this encouragement of their language, which might be easily abolished, and become a dead one in half an age, with little expense, and less trouble'. 'On Barbarous Denominations in Ireland', p. 345.

¹¹³ *The True-born Irishman*, I. p. 85.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I. p. 85.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I. p. 111.

however, represents for the first time, native, not colonial stock, and even in the title of *True-born Irishman*, Macklin is challenging the other tradition, by defining the true-born Irishman as the very opposite of a Patriot. O'Dogherty is a convert, bourgeois, improving estate manager, far more attached to his land than to the acquisition of a debased title by winking at corruption. While Macklin is redefining a proud true-born Irishman, and approving his linguistic, pragmatic and presentee husbandry of his estate and dependants, he is implicitly criticising the management of the grandees of 'Hibernia', but not content with that, he inserts a good deal of trenchant criticism of 'Hibernia' itself.

The play is liminal, appearing in the space between George III's accession to the throne in 1760 and his coronation in September 1761. The Irish parliament fell with the old king's death, and a new one could not form until summoned by the new king. It was a time to draw attention to existing corruption and hope for a new broom to sweep it away; this may have been what motivated Macklin's critique of 'Hibernia.'¹¹⁶

Apart from his overt attack on corruption in the political system, Macklin in *The True-born Irishman* is lending open support to the resurrected Irish gentry. He is furthering the same debate, reaching back to Shadwell and Philips, that surfaced from the 'Gentleman's quarrel' in 1747 about the gentility of the converted Irish. Macklin integrates, in Murrough O'Dogherty, Shadwell's bourgeois gentry and Philips' native Irish gentry, and provides a definitive statement on the balance of quality between Irish society and English importations. Constantia Maxwell found the play 'without depth or probability,'¹¹⁷ but she is wrong: the play is a farce, and so we cannot expect too much

¹¹⁶ George III did introduce numerous reforms, such as an election every eight years, and a resident Viceroy.

¹¹⁷ Constantia Maxwell, p. 245.

by way of furthering our understanding of the human condition, but it is a farce with unexpected bite and depth. As good farce should, it probes, through its vivid characters, vigorous dialogue, and exaggerated action, the tensions that were straining the placid surface of Hibernia.

O'Dogherty is a revolutionary figure in Irish drama for 1761; with him, Macklin makes the theatre subversive of its society, and typifies the duality of the Irish theatre for the rest of the century. On one hand, there was the theatrical repertoire of the Dublin theatres that followed fairly rigorously the successes of London and sought the safety of popular revivals, calculated to satisfy the Anglophile strand. On the other was a steady drip of plays and characters that are all proof of the vigour and colour of the repressed strand in Irish society – Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan, Major O'Flaherty, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Lieutenant O'Connor. During the period, few of the bourgeois gentry, and none of the great lords appears at all. Within the playhouse, the audience may be planters and bourgeois gentry, but the stage is held by the indigenous Irish, whose attitude to 'Hibernia' is at best ambiguous, and often hostile.

This hostility is expressed indirectly by criticism of political chicanery and corruption. Macklin scathingly attacks, through O'Dogherty, and under the disguise of flailing at corruption, the Protestant Interest through its vaunted and treasured Patriotism. A patriot, he tells his brother-in-law,

is a sort of political weathercock, that is blown about by every wind of society, which the foolish people are always looking up at, and staring, and distracting themselves with the integrity of its vicissitudes – today it is blown by the rough ruling tempest of party; next day by the trade-wind of sly, subtle, veering faction; then by the headlong hurricane of the people's hot foggy breath; huzza boys, down with the courtier, up with the patriot, till at last the smooth, soft, gentle warm breeze of interest blows upon it, and

from that moment it rusts to a point, and never stirs after – so there is your puff patriot for you – ogh, to the devil I pitch them all.¹¹⁸

O'Dogherty belongs neither to the Patriot nor the Court party, but to the emerging country party; he occupies the position of a Middleman, the Head Tenant and holder of leases on the estate of an absentee landlord, and is its owner in all but name. Lord Oldcastle, the absentee, has appointed Mushroom as his agent, in compensation for getting his sister pregnant. O'Dogherty despises Mushroom, and to the Lord he feels no obligation whatever: 'It is only a good bargain got from a foolish lord by the ingenuity of a knavish agent.'¹¹⁹ He himself is an improving landlord who rejoices in the sight of 'a hundred head of fat bullocks upon my own land, all ready for Ballinasloe fair.'¹²⁰ He is a believer in the economic basis of society and civilization: all this talk of liberty and self-government is of less importance to him than the smooth operation of economics. He articulates, as *homo economicus*, a theme that could be taken from Arthur Young's writings:

Remember that an honest quiet country gentleman who out of policy and humanity establishes manufactories, or that but a blade of corn grows where there was none before, is of more use to this poor country than all the courtiers, and patriots, and politicians, and prodigals that are unchanged.¹²¹

O'Dogherty, in his capacity as a 'true-born Irishman,' is here expropriating from the Planted gentry their boast of improving agriculture, of the superiority of their estates when compared to the careless husbandry of the Irish. Just as their stone and slated houses dominated the landscape with their implicit declaration of superiority, so their hedges, orchards and demesnes declared the benefits of the order they had imposed on

¹¹⁸ *The True-born Irishman*, I, p. 87.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 89.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 84.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 87.

that landscape, and their fitness to rule. O'Dogherty, in his dedication and development of his land, cancels that claim, and reclaims the responsibility for the native Gentry.

O'Dogherty/Macklin's disdain for Hibernia extends logically from this awareness of corruption to a contempt for its most glittering rewards – the honours that can be bought by money or betrayal. Peerages are easily to be had, says Mrs. Diggerty, and she will have one: she is like a child that wants a toy like the other children have, rather than an important and responsible position:

MRS DIGGERTY Why sir, I am affronted for want of a title: a parcel of upstarts, with their crownets upon their coaches, their chairs, their spoons, their handkerchiefs – nay on the very knockers of their doors – creatures that were below me but t'other day, are now truly my superiors, and have the precedency, and are set above me at table.¹²²

One of her fast set, Mrs. Gazette, takes it for granted how it is done: 'I am sure there are those that have not half your fortune, who have got peerages.'¹²³ But O'Dogherty is not to be shifted into that New English path. It is enough for him that his own name has been lifted back to its proper prominence on the island:

O'Dogherty for ever – O'Dogherty! – there's a sound for you – why they have not such a name in all England as O'Dogherty – nor as any of our fine sounding Milesian names – what are your Jones and Stones, your Rice and your Price, your Heads and your Footes, and Hands, and your Wills, and Hills and Mills, and Sands, and a parcel of little pimping names that a man would not pick out of the street, compared to the O'Donovans, O'Callaghans, O'Sullivans, O'Brallaghans, O' Shaghnesses, O'Flahertys, O'Gallaghers, and O'Doghertys – Ogh, they have courage in the very sound of them, for they come out of the mouth like a storm; and are as old and as stout as the oak at the bottom of the bog of Allen, which was there before the flood – and though they have been dispossessed by upstarts and foreigners, buddoughs and sassanoughs, yet I hope they will flourish in the Island of Saints, while grass grows or water runs.¹²⁴

¹²² *Ibid.*, II. p. 100.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, II. p. 106.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, I. p. 112.

This is an astonishing speech to throw down in front of the 'Hibernians:' if the polarity had been reversed and the Gaelic-Irish had been on the receiving end, they would have wrecked the theatre, but the subversiveness of the play somehow escaped the Dublin audience, blinded by Macklin's reputation, the excellence of the dialogue and acting, and the superb comic turn of Count Mushroom, and perhaps by leaving the two major insults, of 'buddoughs and sassanoughs,' in Irish.¹²⁵ Yet the play was hugely successful and continued to be revived for decades, so O'Dogherty continued to work his subversion on the Irish stage, but he remained unique: there had been no true-born Irish gentlemen before him, and he had few successors. Yet for all his Gaelic truculence he does represent the beginning of a synthesis of the two tendencies I have noted, the responsible bourgeois, and the creative anarchist that form the two sides of the Irish Gentleman as he appears in the drama of the early to late eighteenth century, and he shows most clearly the start of the fusion of the two elements, Irish and English, into one 'Hibernian' Ascendancy type. The Ascendancy as displayed on the stage is by now the bourgeois gentry. They are the audience, as they are the stage characters; the nobility has vanished from behind the proscenium arch as they have from the auditorium, and the Gentry have it to themselves. But not for long; in the plays of O'Keeffe, we will see the beginnings of the rise of the Irish lower classes.

¹²⁵ 'Bodach': a clown, a buffoon, a churl, a peasant unskilled labourer; an insult often levelled by the Irish poets at the New English Gentry. 'Sasanach', an Englishman, by extension any foreigner; in Donegal Irish it also has the meaning of 'Protestant.'

Chapter VII

Radical Shifts

John O'Keeffe's revolutionary spirit; Sheridan Knowles' 'Liberty' plays.

1: John O’Keeffe’s Revolutionary Spirit:

The increasing marginalisation of the Ascendancy in the Irish theatre during the last decade of the eighteenth and the first third of the nineteenth century ranges from O’Keeffe’s polite disregard to Sheridan Knowles’ fervent opposition to the very existence of aristocracy. This awareness first bubbles up in the plays of John O’Keeffe, born in Dublin in 1747. O’Keeffe had a successful career in the Irish theatre, as an actor and a playwright, before decamping permanently to London in 1777, where he rapidly established himself as the most successful playwright of the age.

O’Keeffe practically invented the shorter play; during the final decades of the eighteenth century he kept the Colmans supplied with fore- and after-pieces for the theatres in the Haymarket and Covent Garden. While his forte was musical theatre, he ranged from full-scale opera to five-act comedy. In spite of his success he never enjoyed critical acclaim, because of the way he worked and the genres he worked in. Critical standing was only offered to those who wrote five-act plays – tragedies or comedies – but O’Keeffe’s *metier* was farce; his preferred mode was musical comedy or light opera, and his preferred length was two acts. He was described pejoratively in his own day as a ‘playwright’ rather than a ‘dramatist,’ indicating the artisan rather than the artistic nature of his efforts. As resident playwright with a schedule to feed, first at the Haymarket and later at Covent Garden, he had no preciousness or regard for his own texts, often plundering them for raw material which he cut, edited and fashioned into entertainments in other modes. He was a prodigious producer of pantomimes, harlequinades, and pieces tailored for an occasion such as the birthday of the Prince of Wales¹, or George III’s

¹ *The Birth-Day; or, The Prince of Arragon*, 12th August 1783.

attendance at St. Paul's Cathedral after his recovery from madness.² He used the device, later copied by Boucicault, of altering title to suit location: *Tony Lumpkin's Travels Thro' Cork* mutated to whatever city it was currently playing, before finally settling as *Tony Lumpkin in Town* for the London production. He cut or expanded his plays on demand: *The Toy; or, The Lie of the Day*, for example, exists in both five- and three-act versions. He turned plays into operas or operas into plays, and constantly rewrote and re-arranged his own work or that of other playwrights, inserting songs, altering or removing characters, whole scenes or concepts: *The Poor Soldier* started life as an opera, with bracketing scenes of comic Irish leprechauns, before being reincarnated as a two-act comedy with songs. He and Colman, who was also an experienced and successful playwright, frequently withdrew a play in response to initial criticism or audience indifference, and refashioned it more to the public or critical taste before presenting it again, often with great success. For example, O'Keeffe rewrote his play *The Banditti* as an opera in 1781; the piece failed, but he reworked it as *The Castle of Andalusia* for the following year and scored a great success. It was, wrote *Parker's General Advertiser*, 'so altered and improved, that it is hardly possible to recognize the original'.³

O'Keeffe wrote for a small, tight company – Colman's group of actors at the Haymarket Theatre – and his technique was to create parts specifically for those actors. So closely was he identified with the company at the Haymarket that when their chief comic actor, John Edwin, died in 1790, it was widely expected that O'Keeffe's career as a playwright could not survive without him, but, though the event caused difficulties, he managed to carry on.

² *Saint George's Day; or, Britons Rejoice*, 30th May 1789.

³ Frederick M. Link, 'Introduction', in *The Plays of John O'Keeffe*, ed. by Frederick M. Link, 4 vols (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), pp. xxiv-xxv.

The result of this close relationship with Colman's theatre, actors and management, is that an O'Keeffe play is, even more than most, only a blueprint or sketch of the finished product. The text is all that survives, but that is just the hulk; there is a huge ghostly superstructure floating above it, consisting of the actors, production, setting, music, and the relationship of the audience with each of these elements, of which we can only obtain glimpses. Some details we can glean from contemporary newspaper criticism, from O'Keeffe's unreliable *Recollections*, or from his daughter's memoirs, and the texts themselves may yield clues, some almost invisible. It's not apparent that the juvenile male leads were usually played by women, for instance; Colman's company had a Mrs. Kennedy who specialized in trouser roles, and who created the part of Pat, the poor soldier in O'Keeffe's eponymous play. These were all singing actors, who were valued as much for their singing as their acting ability—Edwin, O'Keeffe's main comic inspiration, was obituarised by Colman the Elder as 'the best Burletta singer that had ever been, or, perhaps ever will be'⁴ – and music nearly always plays a vital part in the production, as did the scenery and the spectacle. O'Keeffe observes, in connection with an early operatic version of *The Wicklow Mountains*, that it failed in spite of the scenery: 'The scenery was splendid, and yet the opera had not the wished effect.'⁵ One of his pieces, *Lord Mayor's Day; or, a Flight from Lapland* (1782) had 'a representation of Lapland, complete with Northern Lights, and a great procession to Westminster. [...] More than two hundred supernumeraries were employed to walk in the procession.'⁶ Another of his harlequinades had a mechanical peacock that was 'beyond all Comparison the most complete Piece of Mechanism ever exhibited', according to the *Public Advertiser*⁷ and 'included the first indoor ascent of an air balloon'.⁸

⁴ *Random Records* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830) I, p. 249, in *The Plays of John O'Keeffe*, ed. by Frederick M. Link, 4 vols (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), I, p. lxviii.

⁵ O'Keeffe, *Recollections*, II, p. 348, in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 343.

⁶ Link, Introduction to *The Plays of John O'Keeffe*, I, p. xxxix.

⁷ *Friar Bacon; or, Harlequin's Adventures in Lilliput, Brobdignag, etc.* in *The Plays of John O'Keeffe*, I, p. xxxv.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. xxx.

The success of this theatrical proving, remodelling, and filtering of artistic endeavour through the sieve of a mass audience is vouched for by the range and durability of the resulting productions. Before 1801, O’Keeffe’s ten most successful plays had received nearly twelve hundred performances in London alone, as well as numerous performances in the English provinces, in Ireland, and in America.⁹ When he died in 1826 his work was still being acted in all three countries, although he had not produced anything new for nearly thirty years. O’Keeffe’s pieces were designed for a new audience in the theatre; the purpose of most of his creations was to entertain the galleries before the arrival of the box-occupiers or after the departure of the fashionable world. The work targets a precise sector, and reflects and moulds its perceptions and interests. This is an urban working-class and lower middle-class audience, many newly arrived from rural areas, and O’Keeffe gives them the familiarity of a pastoral idyll or an urban tavern as a setting. To circumvent the patents held by the ‘legitimate’ theatres, he had to include music in his plays. Many of his songs became popular hits, including one, ‘Hibernia, Happy Isle’, which became a sort of unofficial Irish National Anthem.¹⁰ Where he ventures into the upper-class, he is more inclined to view it from afar. The focus is on the peasants; the Big House is very much in the distance, both pictorially and dramatically. The setting of *The Poor Soldier* is: ‘*The country, sunrise. A large mansion at some distance. Near the front, on one side, a small house; on the other a cottage.*’¹¹ He moves the gentry to the periphery; the upper class may trigger the action by their presence and activities, but O’Keeffe is more concerned with the effects on their social inferiors.

⁹ Link, intro. to *The Plays of John O’Keeffe*, I, p. lix.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

¹¹ Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 279.

The huge popularity of John O’Keeffe’s plays in Ireland, England and America gave him a reach well beyond that of any previous Irish playwright, and the pattern of peasant comedy shot through with serious concerns was one that Boucicault was to build on with such success in his Irish plays. Morash’s observation that O’Keeffe moulded ‘sentimental comedies into parables of reconciliation, heavily laced with Irish music and displays of Irish landscape, making them distinctively Irish, but less dangerous than tragedies drawn from Irish history’ acknowledges how O’Keeffe pursues the ‘inclusive’ line characteristic of Philips and Shadwell. However, he underestimates the subtle, gentle subversiveness of O’Keeffe’s work.

O’Keeffe is not one for open polemics or condemnation; his plays are mostly dramas without villains; the benevolence that was usually such an attribute of the man himself transfers into his work, but one cannot show reconciliation without first exploring the conflict, and this O’Keeffe does, quietly but unflinchingly. Duggan is more stringent in his criticism, while giving some grudging acknowledgement:

With John O’Keeffe the eighteenth century Irish play closes in a curious mixture of cleverness, wit, futility and inane that marks the rapid decline into bathos of the Stage Irishman. Very few plays of the Dublin-born dramatist had any considerable vogue in Ireland. They passed muster amongst the English people and America, already beginning to create for itself the illusion of a fanciful type of Irishman and a mythical Ireland, appears to have looked on O’Keeffe’s productions with enthusiasm. Even Hazlitt hails him as an English Moliere. [...] He discovered a type of play that appealed to a public jaded with false sentimentality, bilious with Germanized pastorals, and in revolt against a twaddling romantic opera. Even though some of the false forms still lingered, nay even obtruded in his plays, he introduced wit, rapid movement and living people, and realising the success of this *genre* he poured out plays with the facility of the modern novelist of detective fiction.¹²

¹² Duggan, p. 142.

Duggan is wrong on several counts. O’Keeffe’s plays were hugely successful in Ireland over a long period of time; *The Wicklow Mountains*, for example, did far better business in Ireland than in England: it was, O’Keeffe writes, ‘a great favourite all over Ireland, and fully as attractive as any thing of mine, particularly in Dublin, where my ‘Gold Mine’ sent much gold to the treasury of the theatre.’¹³ *The Poor Soldier* is extant in forty different editions, not counting separate issues of its songs.¹⁴ O’Keeffe was a professional dramatist, perfectly ready to write “Germanized pastorals” and “twaddling romantic opera” if they were needed. The characters in O’Keeffe’s plays ring the changes on conventional types, but his witty and graceful writing sets them a cut above the average. Duggan’s strictures on both the playwright and detective fiction are unwarranted: such a facility is the mark of the professional. In a large, hurried output, working to a deadline, the quality will inevitably vary, and all one can reasonably expect is that sometimes the writer’s talent will raise his work into something lasting. Only one of O’Keeffe’s plays, *Wild Oats*, has survived into the present day, but his characters, settings, tone, use of Irish music and landscape, set the pattern followed by Boucicault, who was also O’Keeffe’s successor in professionalism and volume of output.

Hazlitt’s verdict: ‘The English Molière [...] In light careless laughter, and pleasant exaggeration of the humorous, we have no equal to him,’¹⁵ could have alerted Duggan. The approval of the great Radical hints at the covert radicalism in O’Keeffe’s work, as he subtly interrogates the upper-class claims to ownership and precedence. The most overt declaration of O’Keeffe’s radicalism is *Le Grenadier* of 1789, which provides a unique insight into his attitudes and also into his working methods. It deals with the fall of the Bastille on July 14th of that year, and shows him as an acute businessman in

¹³ O’Keeffe, *Recollections*, II, p. 343, in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 349.

¹⁴ Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 313.

¹⁵ ‘John O’Keeffe’ < http://pgil-eirdata.org/htm/pgil_datasets/authors/o/O’Keeffe.J/life.htm > [accessed 21/12/2004] (page 1 of 7).

spotting an opportunity. The Haymarket Theatre was closed for the summer when the Bastille fell, but O’Keeffe had the piece in rehearsal in preparation for the opening in September; ‘the scenes were painted, the music composed by Sheild, and the piece rehearsed several times,’¹⁶ when it fell foul of the Lord Chamberlain and was withdrawn. O’Keeffe adds in his *Recollections*, written many years later and never very reliable, that: ‘when the flame of liberty [...] seemed to be converted into hell-fire, and patriotic men into demons, Mr. Harris very prudently thought it advisable not to touch upon the subject, [...] and we went no further with it.’¹⁷ O’Keeffe’s recollection is not convincing. In August 1789 the world was alive with hope and excitement, the Terror years away. The problem was not a surge of anti-French feeling but, as the *Town and Country Magazine* for November 1789 states: ‘that being prohibited in [its] original form by the Chamberlain’, it was being revised ‘for the purpose of suiting [it] to his lordship’s political taste, or more probably to the taste of the French ambassador, who has interfered upon this occasion.’¹⁸ O’Keeffe never presented any revised version, but still valued the piece sufficiently to print it in his *Collected Works* of 1798. What is remarkable about *Le Grenadier*, and why it offended the French ambassador, is its whole-hearted support for the Revolution, which O’Keeffe equates with the English Revolution against the Stuarts, in its overthrowing of absolute monarchy and ensuring that ‘despotic power shall wear a robe no more’.¹⁹

The published text of 1798 shows O’Keeffe’s theatrical imagination in full flow, and how it worked: it consists of songs, arias, duets, ensembles and choruses, linked by elaborately detailed action sequences and spectacular set-pieces, with only one passage

¹⁶ O’Keeffe, *Recollections*, II, p. 144; in *The Plays of John O’Keeffe*, I, p. xlvii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xlviii.

¹⁸ *Town and Country Magazine*, November 1789, p. 518; in *The Plays of John O’Keeffe*, I, p. xlviii.

¹⁹ O’Keeffe, *Le Grenadier*, in *The Plays of John O’Keeffe*, III, p. 221.

of fully-worked-out dialogue.²⁰ What we have here, uniquely, is the superstructure of the play, that would usually disappear in the published text. We can see from it that O'Keeffe put the dialogue in last. He starts with an elaborate and detailed *mis-en-scene*, or storyboard, for the whole piece. For example:

The Governor looking on the bench, sees Dubois' grenadier's hat with the national green cockade and the musket, snatches up the hat in great fury, upbraids Henriette with giving precedence to so mean a rival, tears out the cockade, throws it on the ground, and treads on it. – Madame Clementine with indignation picks up the cockade, presents it to her daughter, commands her to wear it next to her heart, and desires the Governor to see Henriette no more. – He greatly enraged, still having Dubois' hat in his hand, who returns for his musket, sees the hat and claims it. – Madame Clementine points to the cockade in Henriette's breast, asking him if it is his; he acknowledges it. – Madame Clementine with great joy looks on Du Bois, authorises Henriette to receive his addresses. [...] Shouting without; the Governor alarmed; Dubois smiles at him with exultation, acquaints Madame Clementine that the people are going to break open Pincemaille's granaries, and distribute to the poor the corn at a reasonable price..."²¹

O'Keeffe was almost completely blind by this time, having to dictate his work to his daughter, and this bears the stamp of dictation. He next composed and inserted songs and music, and was just beginning to sketch in the dialogue (he had done a scene for his favourite actor, Edwin, as Savatier the cobbler) when the Lord Chamberlain prohibited the piece. The set-pieces he has sketched out demonstrate a powerful theatrical imagination fully in support of the overthrow of the *ancien régime* and the establishment of a new world order based on justice and the rights of all men, what he calls 'the Godlike flame'.²² The authorities and the nobility are forthrightly condemned, the condition of the poor shown with every expression of outrage, and the extraordinary solidarity of all the other sectors of society – the poor, the respectable citizens, men, women, children, and soldiers – against the nobility, is celebrated:

²⁰ Part I, Scene 4, for Savatier and Madaleine.

²¹ *Le Grenadier*, Part I: Scene 1, in *The Plays of John O'Keeffe*, III, p. 189.

²² *Ibid.*, Part I: Scene 1, p. 190.

*The Ladies present Ambroise and all the children [of the military school] with National Cockades, they put them in their hats and huzza. [...] A volley of shot at a distance. The children instantly return; form themselves in order of battle, charge their pieces with exact military discipline – Ambroise stands looking at them with surprise and admiration. [...] Enter Alderfeldt with the Royal Allemandes pursuing – the people prepare to fly -- the Royal Allemandes to follow – the Children interpose, form themselves into regular lines before them, discharge a volley of small shot; thus repulsed, the Royal Allemandes make a stand – Alderfeldt commands them to fire on the children, they refuse. Acorn rushes forward and knocks Alderfeldt down, but is himself surrounded and taken by some of the Royal Allemandes and borne off. The children again charge, the Royal Allemandes ashamed to attack them, yet many wounded and some fallen, they are obliged to retreat. The People take courage, and pursue them; the Women very active in this – Some of the lowest of the rabble attempt to rifle those of the Royal Allemandes that had fallen; the children present their pieces at them and they run off in confusion several ways. – The children and Ambroise express pity for the wounded, and with a show of compassion call out the servants of the school, and surgeons who have them brought in.*²³

In the absence of dialogue, however, it is the songs that mostly carry the message. O'Keefe insists on the legitimacy of the Revolution 'against the abuse but not the laws', as Locke taught.²⁴ It is perfectly just, he asserts, to oppose unjust authority, and a duty to overthrow tyrants.

The songs sing of *liberté*:

Too long we've to oppression stooped;
O! Let's be free or cease to live;
Sweet lily that so long hath drooped,
In glorious sunshine now revive.²⁵

Of *égalité*:

Now shall the honest man be prized,
His blood with Tinkers blended;
And let the villain be despised,
From Clovis tho' descended.²⁶

²³ *Ibid.*, III, p. 201.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Part I. Scene 1. p. 190.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Part III. Scene 3. p. 216.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Part II. Scene 5. p. 210.

and of *fraternité*:

To keep us slaves the great combine;
And shake the lash if we repine.
Come on, brave youths, let's strike the blow,
Our wrongs in acclamation,
Shall let the haughty tyrants know,
The People are the Nation.²⁷

It is easy to see how O'Keeffe's sentiments would cause uneasiness, not just to the French ambassador as the representative of the discredited régime, but to the Lord Chamberlain, as watchdog for an aristocracy looking uneasily over its own shoulder at its huddled, resentful masses. Though speaking of France, O'Keeffe has no hesitation as to where to lay the blame:

But though I sowed, my wheat would never come to flour,
Three things ere I reaped, would all my crop devour:
The Partridge picks the grain up, the blade the Rabbit gobbles,
And all my corn that grew to ears was threshed out by the Nobles.²⁸

The entire burden of the piece, in its action, imagery and music, calls for violent action in the pursuit of freedom: 'to rattling drums our hearts shall beat / Our voices to the trumpet sound,'²⁹ 'our cannon with tremendous roar / Shall join the cry of Liberty.'³⁰ The fall of the Bastille, the storming of the walls, the cannon fire from the defenders, the breaking open of the doors and the release of the prisoners are all shown with spectacular gusto; the Governor, the Profiteer, and other undesirables being led to execution accompanied by '*trophies consisting of large locks, keys, bolts, bars, chains, the iron mask, and other instruments of torture, suspended on poles*', is grippingly presented.³¹

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Part II, Scene 6, p. 212.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Part II, Scene 2, p. 202.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Part II, Scene 2, p. 216.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Part III, Scene 3, p. 216.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Part III, Scene Last, p. 220.

Le Grenadier, in spite of its brilliantly imagined stage-spectacle and action, can hardly be called a play, since, although it has characters and plot, the dialogue is almost non-existent. But for his next work, to replace the cancelled *Le Grenadier*, O'Keeffe produced a five-act comedy, *Wild Oats*, widely regarded as his best play. It shows an increase in subtlety, but no lessening of conviction.³²

In response to the banning of *Le Grenadier*, O'Keeffe's radicalism has gone underground, where it stayed for the rest of his career. *Wild Oats*, far from being conciliatory, is a gospel of levelling, an allegory of *égalité*. Rank is nullified, aristocracy is denied, personal identity becomes opaque and society disintegrates into a generative chaos when the anarchic figure of Rover, the 'stray vaguing'³³ stroller is plunged into it. He overthrows existing structures and precipitates new ones centred on himself. He is the walking incarnation of the revolutionary spirit.

To his levelling theme, O'Keeffe adds the old Irish theatrical obsession with imposture, the construction and deconstruction of identity, and the question of what constitutes gentility. The idea of identity as a construct ties in with the political, social, and economic reconstruction of the Revolution, and also with the constant posing, imposing and deposing that permeate Irish dramatic literature— a sense of the impermanence of identity, personal and tribal, the uneasy mutations of the unfixed self. *Wild Oats* serves up a heady brew of levelling and play-acting. Some characters are thrust into it against their will, like Sir George Thunder; some stumble, like Rover; some fall, like Ephraim; and some, like Harry Thunder, jump in for fun.

³² 'It is hardly propitiatory': Rosemary Bechler, Review of *Wild Oats* at the Lyttleton Theatre, London, *Times Literary Supplement*, 22nd September 1995, p. 20.

³³ *Wild Oats*, III: 2, in *The Plays of John O'Keeffe*, III, p. 43.

Presiding over this social chaos of mistaken identity, imposture and *égalité* like a Lord of Misrule is the piratical, revolutionary figure of Rover. He is a strolling player who impersonates his friend, Harry Thunder, in order to ingratiate himself with Harry's Cousin, Lady Amaranth, the Quaker. Harry appears on the scene but they decide to brazen it out. Harry tells Rover that his father, Sir George, is really an actor who is playing the part of his father, and Rover compounds the motif by casting Sir George as the Duke in *As You Like It*, into which he is dragooning the entire household, from high to low. Rover dazzles and unsettles the house, above and below stairs. 'But who is he?'³⁴ asks Sir George in bewilderment, gets no satisfactory answer, and takes to calling him 'puppy unknown'.³⁵ Rover himself doesn't know who he is, as he was abandoned as a child, and his years on the stage have further weakened his grip on his own identity, until he has become like a force of Nature, which through him speaks irresistibly for revolutionary upheaval: 'For Nature's warm and absolute control / Guides ev'ry impulse of his generous soul.'³⁶ Being an actor, he can assume any character at will, and call on his theatrical background to provide him with suitable language to express it. His powerful personality and performance blasts into the society of the play and explodes it, creating a magnetic field which rearranges all the characters, (including himself) into their proper alignment. Illusions are dissolved, deceptions uncovered and a new reality forged. At the start of the play a community of deceit exists: almost everybody is dissembling, imposing, deceiving, play-acting, or hiding something. Out of Rover's revolutionary chaos identities are reconstructed and real order emerges, Rover turning out to be Sir George's natural son. The restoration of order is a conventional

³⁴ *Ibid.*, V. 4. p. 83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, V. 4. p. 81.

³⁶ Prologue to *Wild Oats*, 'written by John Taylor, Esq.', in *Plays of John O'Keeffe*, III, n. p.

denouement of comedy, with lost children restored to their parents, villains exposed and good rewarded, but there is no mistaking the exhilaration of the revolutionary ride.

The play insists that the obligations of the rich and titled are commensurate with their privileges, and suggests that their ascendancy is merely convention, not natural law. John Dory, Sir George's boatswain and *valet de chambre*, by long association sees himself as Sir George's equal:

SIR GEORGE Was not I your Captain?
 JOHN Yes, and I was your boatswain. And what of all that?
 SIR GEORGE Then how dare you sit in my presence, you bluff head?
 JOHN Why, for the matter of that, I don't mind; but had I been your
 Captain, and you my boatswain, the man that stood by me at sea,
 should be welcome to sit before me at land:
 SIR GEORGE That's true, my dear John; offer to stand up, and, damme,
 if I don't knock you down.³⁷

Sir George's son, Harry, who has run away from Naval College to join the strolling players, has insisted his servant Muz,³⁸ treat him as an equal, but when they leave the company, Muz resists returning to his former servile state, and bemoans the bad example offered by his lord and master while he was on an equal footing. Muz must now deconstruct himself and reconstruct his old persona, but, he says, you cannot put the revolutionary genie back in the bottle; new experiences and new ideas alter men beyond restoration:

HARRY Though 'twas my orders when I set out on this scamper with
 the players, (the better to conceal my quality) for you, before people,
 to treat me as your companion; yet, at the same time, you should have
 had discretion enough to remember, when we're alone, that I am still
 your master, and son to Sir George Thunder.
 MUZ Sir, I ask your pardon; but by making yourself my equal, I've got
 used to familiarity, that I find it curst hard to shake it off.

³⁷ *Wild Oats*, I. 1. p. 2.

³⁸ Given as 'Mudge' in the *Dramatis Personae*, but always 'Muz' in the text of the play.

- HARRY Well, Sir, pray mind, that familiarity is all over now. My frolic's out. I now throw off the player, and shall directly return.
[...]
- MUZ And, Sir, shall you and I never act another scene together? Shall I never again play Colonel Standard for my own benefit? Never again have the honour of caning your Honour in the character of Tom Errand?
- HARRY In future act the part of a smart hat and coat brusher, or I shall have the honour of kicking you in the character of an idle puppy. You were a good servant; but I find, by letting you crack your jokes, and sit in my company, you're grown quite a rascal.
- MUZ Yes, Sir, I was a modest, well-behaved lad; but evil communication corrupts good manners.³⁹

This play is unusual in O'Keeffe's work in that he uses overlapping storylines to reinforce his main theme. Lady Amaranth, the female lead, has been raised as a Quaker and insists on treating everybody as an equal, to the umbrage of her uncle, Sir George: 'And there is my rich lady niece, pressing and squeezing up the noble plumage of our illustrious family in her little, mean, quaker bonnet.'⁴⁰ The other Quakers, too, impose equality on Sir George, to his anti-revolutionary outrage:

- ZACHARY Verily, George.
- SIR GEORGE George! Sirrah, tho' a younger brother, the honour of knighthood was my reward for placing the glorious British flag over that of a daring enemy – therefore address me with respect.
- ZACHARY Yea, I do, George.
- SIR GEORGE George and Mary! here's levelling, here's abolition of title with a vengeance! zounds! in this house, they think no more of an English Knight than a French Duke.⁴¹

All this atmosphere of levelling supports the central argument that Rover can become anyone he wants, by constructing a character and assuming the part. Aristocracy is a performance, a convention, that can, and should, be demolished or re-arranged in a more meritocratic manner, a message applauded by an audience aware of Rousseau's

³⁹ *Wild Oats*, I. 2. p. 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, III. 2. p. 44.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 6.

ideals and the works of Tom Paine on the Rights and 'Claims of Man' in England and America.

This subterranean Radical outlook is consistent throughout O'Keeffe's work, and transfers directly into his overtly Irish plays.

The success of O'Keeffe in Ireland indicates the changed nature of that audience too. He focuses on the way the lower classes view the Ascendancy, and a pattern quickly emerges. In spite of the drain of absenteeism, and the social and economic injustices, all the characters are regarded as unquestionably Irish; what O'Keeffe does, for the first time, is to set the fault-lines of the drama along class divisions. He gives a surprising weight to the articulation of Irish grievances, but these are not the 'Molyneux' objections, expressing Ascendancy concerns with polity and commerce, but the complaints of the peasantry and lower classes, comprising the entire wealth generating apparatus of the Ascendancy – enclosures, absenteeism, payment of tithes to a church to which they don't belong:

O'HANLON See you not what heavy grievances we lay under – our great landlords spending their money abroad, their stewards patch by patch enclosing our commons, and their parsons with their rich livings leaving us in the claws of their cursed tithe proctors.⁴²

This speech is given in *The Wicklow Mountains* by Redmond O'Hanlon, a 'roaring boy' who speaks in character, but there is no attempt made to refute his position, and Franklin, the incoming landlord, endorses it in his final speech:

⁴² O'Keeffe, *The Wicklow Mountains*, II. 2. in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 376.

FRANKLIN And yet, Mr. Donnybrook, in this land of abundance, why should our peasantry languish in such lamentable wretchedness – were we to turn our attention a little more to this, instead of the unhappy necessity of punishing crimes, we might prevent their commission, by awakening them from the idleness of despondency with our countenance and protection, and rewarding their labours by the genial and cherishing encouragement of kindness and humanity.⁴³

But even this Georgian paternalism is undercut by Donnybrook, who “cherishes and encourages” them by prohibiting the peasants’ access to the gold mine and annexing it as a capital asset for Ascendancy benefit.

The intersection of the two classes, the Gentry mixing with the local peasants, is a repeated feature of O’Keeffe’s Irish plays; it is shown, however, to be a masquerade. Donnybrook, Franklin, and Helen Donnybrook, in *The Wicklow Mountains*, and Fitzroy in *The Poor Soldier* are all false personas, constructed for the occasion. Donnybrook marks his arrival from Dublin by sending back his carriage and servants, changing from his grand clothes into brown peasant garb, and boasting of his love of the lower classes and lack of pride. Franklin, the incoming landlord, arrives disguised as a pedlar, and Donnybrook’s daughter, Helen, is pretending to be sick to escape from the matchmaking of her mother. Fitzroy, in *The Poor Soldier* is even more ambiguous: he is consciously slumming in pursuit of Father Luke’s niece. Though the arrival of the Donnybrooks and the appearance of Fitzroy are the events on which the dramas hinge in the two plays, the central focus is not on them but on the peasants or servants, and how this invasion disrupts them. O’Keeffe’s drama has become contrapuntal, with the lower classes, who are Irish and peasant, taking the foreground, with their distinctive language, music and song, while the upper-class is relegated to grind along unheeded, occasionally pushing itself forward, before being eased into the background again. If this is the mixing of the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, III. 3, Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 400.

cultures, it is all on one side, the gentry attempting to sample the reality of the lower classes by dressing down and mixing with them, but jangling out of tune. True *égalité* is not allowed: this sort of mingling is limited by rigid class valves to prevent the lower classes from mingling upwards, as Donnybrook exemplifies in *The Wicklow Mountains*. He starts the play with the illusion of his own egalitarianism: 'I've not the least pride; I'm never above making free with what is called the lower classes.'⁴⁴ Billy takes him at his word, borrows his clothes, and offers to marry Donnybrook's daughter, which is greeted with outrage: 'Touch my clothes, and even dare look at my daughter! I may thank my condescending humility for this.'⁴⁵ Anything akin to the startling wedding of the peasant girl and the lord of the manor in Shadwell's *Irish Hospitality* is absent. O'Keeffe shows no infiltration of Gaelic or Catholic influences on the gentry, either; they are influenced by Rousseau or Romanticism. Donnybrook rhapsodises: 'In town I was gay; I rattled, swore, guzzled and gambled – but here I'm rural, simple and serene.'⁴⁶ O'Keeffe shows us an inversion of an earlier pattern: the sham gentlemen of the preceding century have been replaced by sham peasants. In *The Poor Soldier* Fitzroy articulates the philosophy of the French Radicals, and the Brotherhood of Man, but does so covertly out of the hearing of his friends and relations in the Big House:

My dear sir, be assured that I am incapable of an illiberal prejudice against anyone for not having first breathed the same air with me, or for worshipping the same deity in another manner. We are common children of one parent, and the honest man who thinks with moral rectitude, and acts according to his thoughts, is my countryman, let him be born where he will.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II. 3. p. 359.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II. 2. p. 387.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 3. p. 358.

⁴⁷ *The Poor Soldier*, I. 1. in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 285.

Similarly, while Franklin and Donnybrook in *The Wicklow Mountains* consciously adopt an egalitarian stance, they lack the philosophical underpinning to sustain it, and revert to type when their ascendancy is challenged.

O’Keeffe’s plays set in Ireland can be characterised as enacting the return of the absentee: the Ascendants descending into the life of the people, expecting to condescend and control, but, equally, it portrays the independence of the lower classes, who sideline, bamboozle and manipulate them with ease. The denouement may be sanctioned by Ascendancy authority, but, as with Boucicault, it has been engineered by peasant guile. The contrast between *Wild Oats* and the Irish plays is remarkable. In the first, the revolutionary detonation in polite society causes permanent and worthwhile change; in the Irish plays, the descent of the Ascendancy into lower-class society results in few salutary consequences. Any outcome is usually for the worse, though it is not entirely a futile exercise for the upper class, as the plays show them learning from the lower classes – a common enough Rousseauesque motif, the burden of it being that the lower classes are the real people, not those in the Big House. Fitzroy gives up Norah to Pat saying: ‘The Captain thought himself unworthy of her, when he found superior merit in the poor soldier.’⁴⁸

The issue of the goldmine in *The Wicklow Mountains* taps into the politics of the land and the economics of tenure. The peasants, who are close to the land and retain a powerful vestigial conviction of a withheld inheritance, have no legal hold, and exist only on the sufferance of the landlords, while the legal ownership of the land by the gentry produces profit but no spiritual attachment. The play is at heart a socialist text, and raises directly the question of who owns the resources and wealth that the land

⁴⁸ *The Poor Soldier*, II. 5. in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 311.

generates. Felix, the peasant who discovered the gold, takes a Radical view and keeps the mine secret and safe from the avaricious grasp of the legal owner, so that he could perform the revolutionary action of spreading the benefits from it around among the people of the estate – from those who have to those who need.⁴⁹ Felix has to yield it up to the new legal owner, who takes it into his own keeping, removing its benefits from the people. Felix was exploiting it in the local, communal interest, but it is annexed into the patronage and use of the landed gentry. Dross, the lawyer, arrives from Dublin ‘to help the lord of the manor to freight all the herring boats in the bay with glorious bullion’.⁵⁰ Felix believes, however, that it belongs to the people; he has abolished private property to keep it out of the grip of Franklin’s avaricious uncle – who has legal ownership but no moral right. The people cannot possess the goldmine legally any more than they can own the land they live on; it is annexed by the landlords, and disappears behind the legal pale of upper-class privilege to secure the asset and concentrate the profits. The upper-class owns the law as well as the land and its resources, and uses the legal instruments to prevent the peasants getting above their proper station. The only resource which the peasantry can exploit is their labour, and though they own that, it too is annexed and enclosed by Donnybrook: ‘Each man must leave gold-hunting, and return to a much nobler resource – honest labour,’⁵¹ while the gentry enjoy the long term benefits. Felix has defied accepted economics, which dictates that all wealth generated is the property of the owner of the capital. Donnybrook, who never does any work, serves to point up the dronelike quality of the Ascendancy using the law to augment and extend their wealth and position, as Redmond O’Hanlon complained. They have already

⁴⁹ Felix’s activities have a good deal in common with the tenets of Thomas Spence (1750-1815) an English Radical, republican and socialist who advocated that all land and resources should be held in common by each parish, and all profits, taxes, and rents accruing used to support the schools, libraries, hospitals, for the local community;

< <http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/c-eight/people/spence/htm> > [accessed 05/03/2005] (page 1 of 2).

⁵⁰ *The Wicklow Mountains*, III. 1. in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 392.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, III. 3. p. 401.

enclosed the common land, and this is the enclosure of labour, the annexation of another wealth-creating resource on behalf of the ruling class. One is reminded of Karl Marx's comment on capital 'which vampire-like lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more it sucks'.⁵² Perhaps even more pointedly the passage recalls Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), in which he holds that it is not gold or silver that constitutes the wealth of nations, but labour only, and the relationship between the labourers and their exploiters is one of mutual enslavement, in which the workers labour without reward, and the landed aristocracy is reduced to passivity, indifference and dependence.⁵³ The action of *The Wicklow Mountains* is that of a furtive, flickering revolution, in which the proletariat abolish private property, seize control of the resource and install a revolutionary and egalitarian economy, which O'Keeffe regretfully allows to be overthrown in the interests of law and order. The anarchy that followed the French Revolution was still distressing him: 'when the flame of liberty [...] seemed to be converted into hell-fire, and patriotic men into demons'.⁵⁴ O'Keeffe, nevertheless, is subtly but consistently subversive of the ruling class.

In *The Poor Soldier* Fitzroy, the closet Egalitarian, is consciously slumming in pursuit of Norah, afraid of being seen either by his relations and cronies in Carton House, or by the people of the village. Fitzroy is at best ambiguous, and his desire for Nora, the priest's niece, has a frisson of forbidden fruit about it, and also a smell of predatory aristocracy; the play at this point could almost act as a prologue to *The Colleen Bawn*.

⁵² Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Chapter 10. Section 1.

<<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm>> [accessed 27/04/2005]

⁵³ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. by R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), I. p. 54.

⁵⁴ O'Keeffe, *Recollections*, II. p. 144, in *The Plays of John O'Keeffe*, I, p. xlvii.

The roots of Boucicault are very obvious in *The Wicklow Mountains* and in *The Poor Soldier*. In particular, the former play, which has the darker tinge to it, gives a template for *Arrah na Pogue* — the Wicklow setting, the jail-break, the nobility of Felix taking the blame for a crime he did not commit. Felix, the crafty peasant philanthropist, holds the seeds of Boucicault's loveable rogues. In *The Poor Soldier*, Fitzroy is a model for Hardress Cregan in *The Colleen Bawn*, and Father Luke, the imbibing, ambitious, but lively priest, could be an early study for the priests in that play and in *The Shaughraun*, both of whom also have their nieces living with them as housekeepers. The exchange between Donnybrook and Sullivan about the possible banditry of Felix in Act I, Scene 3 of *The Wicklow Mountains* could be mistaken for Boucicault:

SULLIVAN Felix, I charge you before Squire Donnybrook, as a common
 highway footpaddy.
DONNYBROOK Then this is the lad you've been abusing so?
BILLY Sir, he's a robber.
DONNYBROOK He can't, he saved my life.
BILLY He's the scarecrow of the whole country.
DONNYBROOK Impossible, he saved my daughter.
SULLIVAN I tell you, sir, he's a most notorious depredator.
DONNYBROOK No such thing; he saved my four coach horses. — your proofs?
SULLIVAN Sir, he wears the best of clothes.
BILLY And a ruffled shirt; so he must be a rogue.
 [...]
SULLIVAN Why you do more good in the village than all of us put
 together: so you must be a bad man. ⁵⁵

With the advances in stage technique and scenery, the countryside and landscape is beginning to play a part in the O'Keeffe's drama; it is becoming, both visually and verbally, an adumbration of Boucicault's sentient landscape that sometimes takes a hand in the plot. It is shown as a counter-attraction to the follies of Dublin, a place of clean air and health, an honest landscape for honest people, as Donnybrook thinks it: 'Here I'm rural, simple, and serene.'⁵⁶ He changes his mind by the end, though, finding that

⁵⁵ *The Wicklow Mountains*, I. 3. in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 360.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 3. in Wheatley & Donovan, II, p. 358.

there are rogues everywhere. Donnybrook is on release from his town life, and neither he nor Franklin belongs in the landscape. Donnybrook is abandoned by Billy and left to wander about lost, as Molineux is in *The Shaughraun*, an indication of his alienness in this environment. Franklin is returning as heir to the estate of his uncle whom he last visited fifteen years earlier. A feature of the Irish Ascendancy and their lack of grip on their people was this constant shifting sideways of ownership, until the people of the estate were connected spiritually more to the Big House than to the family that lived there, to bricks and mortar rather than flesh and blood. Elizabeth Bowen called the Big Houses the theatres of the Ascendancy, and when the time came to break the connection, it was these theatres rather than the players in them that took the brunt of the severance, a process that Yeats understands, but deplores, in *Purgatory*:

But he killed the house; to kill a house
Where great men grew up, married, died,
I here declare a capital offence.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ W.B. Yeats, *Purgatory*, ed. Richard Alan Cave, *Selected Plays* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 257.

2: Sheridan Knowles' 'Liberty' Plays:

The split between the classes was exploited by O'Keeffe, but subtly and in a farcical mode; in the plays of James Sheridan Knowles it is prised open to a yawning chasm by the ideas of dissent and revolution. Sheridan Knowles (1784-1862) was the son of a teacher and lexicographer who was a first cousin of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. He was born in Cork and showed early signs of dramatic talent, but the family moved to London when he was nine, after the Cork Protestant gentry withdrew their children from his father's school as a result of his support for Catholic Emancipation. As a young man in London, Knowles came under the influence of William Hazlitt, the incorrigible Dissenter, who held him in high esteem from an early age: 'We have known him almost from a child', Hazlitt wrote, 'and we must say he appears to us the same boy-poet that he ever was. He has been cradled in song, and rocked in it as in a dream.'⁵⁸ Knowles acknowledges that the greatest influence in his thinking and writing was Hazlitt: 'Mr. William Hazlitt', he wrote, 'is one of my earliest and best esteemed friends. [...] Whatever ideas I have of late I owe to him. [...] Indeed he is the parent of my style.'⁵⁹ In 1808, after studying medicine and spending some time in the army, Knowles took to the stage, returned to Ireland and joined Andrew Cherry's company, which included

⁵⁸ William Hazlitt, 'Elia and Geoffrey Crayon', *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), <<http://blupete.com/Literature/Essays/Hazlitt/SpiritAge/Elia.htm>> [accessed 25/02/2005] (page 6 of 6).

⁵⁹ Gerald D. Parker, '“I am going to America:” James Sheridan Knowles' *Virginus*, and the Politics of 'Liberty'', in *Theatre Research International*, 17, No. 1 (Spring 1992) 15-25 (p. 16).

Edmund Kean. Knowles played Hamlet at Crow Street, and while they were at Waterford, produced his first book of poetry and his first play, *Leo; or, The Gypsy*. He then started a school in Belfast with his father, and, in 1811 had his first significant play, *Brian Boroimhe*, produced there.

This is a minor play, but the lineaments of his style are already appearing in it, as is the essential nature of his Radical political outlook. *Brian Boroimhe* is the latest version of the story that William Philips first told in *Hibernia Freed*. It had been through at least two other mutations since, in Howard's *The Siege of Tamor*, and a lost play by a Dublin actor, Daniel O'Meara, before Knowles reworked it into its greatest popular success.⁶⁰ In *Brian Boroimhe* the identification of the Anglo-Irish with the country is complete; the politics is muted, and Knowles completes the trend started by Philips that defines the Irish, not by politics, but by culture. Politics still rears its head occasionally, as in Brian's paraphrase of the speech that Philips borrowed from Shadwell:

We gave them land – we gave them wives – we said
 “Remain with us – let us become one people”
 [...]
 These strange friends
 Through avarice of power, became our foes:
 They strove to turn their hosts into their slaves.
 We spurned them, smote them, crushed them – we were free.⁶¹

That could be interpreted as a commentary on the English incursion, and such passages were implicated in the subsequent popularity of the play in Ireland and among the Irish in America, where it was still being revived in 1870. Knowles' main focus is not, however, on a separatist or nationalist agenda but on the exploitation of a rich, shared cultural identity. Where Philips gifted the ancient Irish with a Classical civilization, Knowles informs them with Romantic medieval grandeur. The play is full of nineteenth-

⁶⁰ ‘Based on a play by Daniel O’Meara’, James Sheridan Knowles, *Brian Boroimhe; or, The Maid of Erin*, Dicks’ Standard Plays (London: John Dicks, 1837?), title page.

⁶¹ *Brian Boroimhe*, II. 2. p. 8.

century imaginings of mediaevalism, chivalric exploits, and imagined pomp. Knowles' grasp of Irish history may be shaky, but his overall imaginative effect is coherent; Brian is a monarch of chivalry, with two sets of knights at his command, the Knights of Connor, and the Knights of the Red Branch. In one key scene, Brian sits enthroned, and inducts his champion, O'Donohue, into the Knights of the Red Branch, surrounded by his court of knights in armour, ladies, sumptuous costumes, music and flying banners showing a red cross, a harp, and a lion, that link Brian to the medieval tradition of the Crusades, Richard the Lionheart, and King Arthur. In contrast to this tradition of chivalry and high culture, the Danes are unprincipled, devious and barbaric – exactly the qualities with which the native Irish used to be characterised:

*Act I, Scene 5, Chapel of the Knights of Connor.
Banner of the Red Cross. HIGH PRIEST, two
ASSISTANTS, four HARPERS, four SOLDIERS,
RODERICK and TERRENCE, DESMOND and
MACARTHY MOORE, BOYS bearing cushion, sword,
&c. O'DONOHUE, BRIAN, Banner of the lion,
ILENE, LADIES, SOLDIERS – Music. The king seated;
Chief Harper conducts O'Donohue to him; O'Donohue
kneels on the cushion, the king knights him; O'Donohue
returns to his place.*

BRIAN

Knight of the Red Branch, rise, O'Donohue.

[...]

[The Chief Harper comes forward and sings:]

Strike the harp! Strike the harp! Raise the song to great Brian,
Oft, oft the rapt bard the glad strain shall renew.

In peace mild and bounteous, in battle a lion;
In the hearts of his people reigns Brian Boro'.⁶²

Irish music and song play a crucial part in Knowles' panoply of medieval Ireland. No music has survived, but the above verse has the galloping anapaestic rhythm often used by Thomas Moore, or the tune of *St. Patrick's Day*, the unofficial national anthem. One of the songs is acknowledged to have words by Moore,⁶³ while another is set to the tune

⁶² *Ibid.*, I. 5, p. 6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, I. 2, p. 9.

of '*The Meeting of the Waters*'.⁶⁴ An unusual attribute of the Irish is their unity of purpose compared to the Danes' internal divisions. All of this has the effect of evoking a myth to flatter his audience, but there is one striking anomaly in the text, in the form of a dissenting Dane, Voltimer, whose sense of honour is outraged by the scheming and trickery of his master, Tormagnus:

VOLTIMER

It would have pleasur'd me
To walk unbidden into Brian's hall,
And from among his thronging courtiers bear
The prize you seek. I should have deemed it sport,
To win the maid by dint of my bold sword.
But such a minion feat as this? For shame!
Let us put off these frowning helms of ours,
And lay by our hacked armour! 'Tis a feat
Might suit a silken reveller, indeed,
But not a man in steel. ⁶⁵

This is Knowles' first portrait of the outsider, a strong individual who has outgrown the morality of his own society, a dissenting, even messianic, figure who follows a course of action dictated by his own moral code, even to his death. The outlaw's advanced moral perception alienates him from his own community, and as a beleaguered idealist he is sympathetic to an audience. Knowles sounds in this play the internationalist note that hints at the Socialism that bursts out in his later work. Such men, he says, are more likely to find kindred spirits among the ranks of the enemy than in their own society; dissenters need to look further afield to find support for their ideas, to form a scattered Diaspora of Dissent:

VOLTIMER More than homes
Do kindred spirits foster brotherhood;
There is an affinity ten times more near
Than flesh and blood or common country make. ⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, II. 3. p. 10.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 2, p. 10.

Voltimer does not consider either Irish or Danish morality as superior, but follows his own judgement by rescuing Brian's daughter from his own king, Tormagnus, and getting killed by his own people. The play encapsulates a favourite paradox in Knowles' writing, that partakes both of Dissent and Romantic ideals – the importance of individual effort in pursuit of a higher goal, and the certainty that such an effort will be crushed by superior force:

BRIAN The battle rests upon a single hand,
 Though thousands wave the sword – remember that!
 And every man discharge his part as though
 He strove in single fight.⁶⁷

Voltimer is more fully realised than most of Knowles' characters, perhaps because it is one he played himself; the same is true of his greatest role, that of William Tell in his play of the same name.⁶⁸ Knowles doesn't write rounded characters; he writes attitudes, actions and reactions; he is very good at plot and creating clean lines of action and clear situations that roll naturally from one to the other. The creation of the characters he leaves to his actors, who were the leading ones of the age – Kean, Macready, Forrest, Helen Faucit. He plainly regards this as their job, their contribution to the collective effort. This method gives the plays a flat feeling on reading, although they had the reputation of being brilliant on the stage. 'He had no literary genius,' writes Saintsbury dismissively in *Short History of English Literature* (1922), 'and not a very strong literary talent, so that his works, useful on the boards, are lumber on the shelves.'⁶⁹ This is a trifle hard: most plays of that age were written either as stage drama or closet drama,

⁶⁷ *Brian Boromhe*, II. 1. p. 8.

⁶⁸ The Dicks' edition of *Brian Boromhe* gives the Covent Garden cast of 1837, with Edmund Kean as Brian and Knowles as Voltimer.

⁶⁹ 'J. Sheridan Knowles' < http://pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/k/Knowles.JS/life.htm > [accessed 15/11/2004] (page 3 of 4).

that is, to be performed in the theatre, or to be read at home. Very few playwrights attempted both, but Knowles did, and his published plays were hugely popular, particularly in America. Knowles was credited in his time with 'restoring tragedy at once to its proper dignity and to a good measure of popularity in the theatre'.⁷⁰ He was according to Hazlitt, 'the first tragic writer of the age',⁷¹ and Hazlitt also praises the truth and simplicity of his dialogue, and the clarity of his action and situations. The plays, unfortunately, alternate between clear, simple verse and the idiom of Romantic excess that seems sadly dated today, written as it was for the style of the great contemporary actors. L.H. Meeks sums it up:

It held the stage successfully while the style prevailed, but when the actors of the day passed, the play went with them [...] Its distinctive characteristics are elocutionary pyrotechnics and romantic excess. Though dust and ashes now, these lines, with their hint of Byronic fire, must have been resonantly effective when delivered by a Macready or a Forrest to an audience of the 1830's and 1840's.⁷²

Voltimer is the first attempt by Knowles at the Byronic figure that forms the backbone of his next plays, *Caius Gracchus* and *Virginius*, the figure of the idealist who is in violent opposition to his own corrupt society.

The programme of 'Reform' current in the early eighteenth century was modest enough – the widening of the franchise to all men, equal electoral districts, annual elections, and a secret ballot. Knowles is deeply pessimistic that the success of that programme will lead to a cleansing of the political system; *Caius Gracchus* (1815) is a Radical tract that is deeply sceptical of the Radical platform. He shows that the people will, at the first

⁷⁰'Nineteenth-Century Drama', *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, 18 vols (Cambridge: University Press, 1907-1921) XIII, Part 1, <<http://www.bartleby.com/223/0805.html>>, [accessed 25/02/2005] (page 2 of 3).

⁷¹ Hazlitt, 'Elia and Geoffrey Crayon', in *The Spirit of the Age*, (p. 6 of 6).

⁷² Leslie Howard Meeks, *Sheridan Knowles and the Theatre of his Time* (Bloomington, Ind.: Principia Press, 1933), p. 111.

opportunity, abandon those who try to raise them, but embrace those they should spurn. A people accustomed to tyranny will, if given the vote, elect tyrants to rule over them, and elected tyrants are worse than inherited ones – you have only yourself to blame:

MARCUS What can the people do? They have no friends that will speak
or act for them. The people can do nothing of themselves – they have
no power. If the people could find friends –

LICINIUS Peace! peace! If you gain friends, you lose them straight.
Whoe'er would die for you, you let him die!
You shrug, you shiver, and you whine; but he
That pities you, has need, himself, of pity.
[...]
Would the patricians learn of me,
I'd teach them how to cater for the people.
They should not have a vote. If free-born men
Will crouch like slaves, why would you have them freemen.⁷³

Caius Gracchus, though set in ancient Rome, is a contemporary play wearing a toga: the topical frame of reference is hardly hidden at all under the Roman cloak. In the play the Patricians deal savagely with any threat to their power. Opimius the Consul speaks for the entrenched ruling class when confronted with opposition:

How would you cure a state o'errun with evils
But as you'd cleanse a garden rank with weeds?
Up with them by the roots!⁷⁴

He is unaware that, ironically, the very same sentiments can be directed at himself, and were directed at the *ancien régime* in France. The Patricians ('cruel, luxurious, avaricious; masters, oppressors, tyrants'⁷⁵) consider and treat the Plebeians as cattle:

⁷³ *Caius Gracchus*, I. 1. in *The Dramatic Works of James Sheridan Knowles*, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1856), I, p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 2. p. 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, III. 1. p. 29.

MARCUS They have as great dominion over the people, as over their oxen; and so they treat them like their oxen – unhide them, hack them up, and feed upon them.⁷⁶

The play is rich with sympathetic allusions to the wretched plight of the poor and the soldiers who are now cast out of the army, when there's no fighting left to do:

CAIUS Your wretchedness afflicts
the heart of Caius. Thousands of brave men,
Wandering about the streets of Rome, without
means, or employment to procure them.⁷⁷

and evokes a scene out of 19th century England rather than ancient Rome.

CAIUS The poor people –
The houseless citizens, that sleep at nights
Beneath the portals, and that starve by day
Under the noses of the senators.⁷⁸

Caius Gracchus takes an egalitarian, democratic view, inveighing against the unequal application of the laws in a society that was being ground down by legal oppression:

CAIUS The laws! the laws! that guard the common right!
The wealth, the happiness, the freedom of
The nation! Who has hidden them – defaced them –
Sold them – corrupted them from the pure letter?
Why do they guard the rich man's cloak from a rent,
And tear the poor man's garment from his back?
Why are they, in the proud man's grasp, a sword,
And in the hand of the humble man, a reed?⁷⁹

The Napoleonic wars prevented the spread of revolution to the now United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, but after the battle of Waterloo in 1815 there was a pent-up need for reform, as well as, among the ruling class, a horror of revolutionary ideas. The

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, III. 2. p. 31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, III. 2. p. 36.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, II. 3. p. 23.

need for reform was blocked by their determination to hold on to what they had and to ensure they did not suffer the fate of France's aristocracy. Their strategy was repression. High prices for food during the war had made many landowners rich; after the war they tried to control the market and keep prices high, preventing the importation of grain while the lower classes were clamouring for cheap bread in the post-war depression. The ruling class and Parliament tried to keep dissent under control by passing, in 1799, the Anti-Combination laws, which forbade any concerted action by the masses or the forming of any trades unions. Incidents such as the Peterloo massacre in 1819 show a country in which class repression and resentment had built up to a point at which revolution was certainly a possibility, in England as in Ireland, and in which radical reformers and demagogues such as Henry Hunt or Thomas Spence could get a large and enthusiastic following.

It is into this cauldron of discontent and injustice that Knowles pitches his 'Liberty' plays – *Caius Gracchus*, *Virginius*, and *William Tell*.

Caius Gracchus contains a trenchant attack on a corrupt and intransigent ruling class that owns the land and the resources, controls the government and administers the law in its own interest. It also, however, considers the Reform platform as grossly inadequate in the teeth of the obdurate opposition of such an entrenched class. Knowles shows two tribunes of the people, elected by their vote, Caius Gracchus and Drusus, one an idealist, one corrupt, and shows that the idealist must fail, going Messiah-like to his death, abandoned by the people he was trying to save. Yet the lesson he learns from his mother Cornelia is that the effort must be made, even though it is doomed to defeat: 'Though vain the struggle, yet 'tis fit 'twere made,/ When bold injustice scoffs at laws, and 'gins/

to ride it, rough-shod, o'er them.' ⁸⁰ It is the nature of the idealist, Voltimer or Caius Gracchus, to burst through the limits imposed by society and become an outcast in his quest for the greater good.

In theatrical matters Knowles' great champion was the actor William Macready, who shaped and directed the plays for the stage. Macready was an ardent republican: in his diary he wrote: 'I abhor class rule, be it of what grade it may be. The country is for all, of all and ought to be governed from all.' And he berated the 'whimpering wretches that howl at the small retaliation of a French Revolution for ages of oppression and tyranny'.⁸¹ Macready and Hazlitt formed Knowles' ideas and moulded him creatively into the theatrical path of Dissent and Republicanism. From his Irish heritage Knowles knew the value of the theatre as a political tool: the political power of the theatre had been an ongoing reality in Ireland for centuries, in articulating alternative realities and stimulating public opinion. In O'Keeffe the radicalism is an undercurrent, but in Knowles it surfaces as a raging torrent. Like those of Bertolt Brecht, Knowles' plays were the product of a disturbed age, and they dramatised values and possibilities other than those of the prevailing rulers, and championed the values and rights of the oppressed and downtrodden classes against the tyranny of the current system. Knowles' plays, not surprisingly, were loathed by the Conservative press. *John Bull*, in particular was vehement in its denunciation of the 'democratic, ranting, trashy plays of Knowles'.⁸²

Knowles builds *Caius Gracchus* out of the fragmentation of the body politic that followed the Napoleonic wars. His message is that class oppression by one's fellow countrymen is worse than enslavement by a foreign oppressor; the preservers of freedom

⁸⁰ *Caius Gracchus*, III. 4. p. 48.

⁸¹ Parker, p. 17.

⁸² Meeks, p. 79.

themselves preside over an unfree society; liberating foreign countries from Napoleon's yoke is of scant merit when the greater part of the home population is enslaved by a ruling minority. If we compare Knowles' play *Caius Gracchus* of 1815 with Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro* of 1800, the difference is marked. Sheridan's play, as political as anything by Knowles, casts the Spanish invasion of Peru into the same mould as Bonaparte overrunning Europe, and is intended as a unifying force in a Britain alive with the fear of a French invasion, a hymn to British stout-heartedness, liberal traditions, and constitutional monarchy, in the face of immoral tyranny:

Your generous spirit has compared [...] the motives which [...] can animate *their* minds and OURS - THEY, by a strange frenzy driven, fight for power, for plunder, and extended rule - WE, for our country, our altars, and our homes. THEY follow an adventurer whom they fear - and obey a power which they hate - WE serve a monarch whom we love - a God whom we adore. [...] They call on us to barter all of good we have inherited and proved, for the desperate chance of something better which they promise. - Be our plain answer this: The throne we honour is the PEOPLE'S CHOICE - the laws we reverence are our brave Fathers' legacy - the faith we follow teaches us to live in bonds of charity with all mankind, and die with hope of bliss beyond the grave. Tell your invaders this, and tell them too, we seek no change; and least of all, such change as they would bring us.⁸³

Caius Gracchus, on the other hand, is a Radical attack on the entire system; Knowles' *Virginius* was hailed in the American press as a paean to freedom and liberty, but *Caius Gracchus* is far more outspoken on the rights of the common people. The Patricians despise the Plebeians but are forced by democratic pressure to adopt a complaisant façade, and easily manipulate themselves back into positions of power, with the enthusiastic support of the supposedly emancipated proletariat – an incidence of the enduring bond between the enslaver and the enslaved:

CAIUS What! would they take our tigers,

⁸³ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *Pizarro*, II. 2. 17, in *Sheridan's Plays*, ed. by Cecil Price (Oxford: University Press, 1975), p. 407.

They've seen a hundred times tear limb from limb
the malefactor – would they take them, think you
For dogs, suppose they fawn'd on them? ⁸⁴

Though he champions the common people, Knowles has no illusions about them: he shares the Patricians' contempt for the fickleness and easy malleability of the mob.

Fraser's Magazine wrote of the first London production of *Caius Gracchus*:

War is declared against the very idea of aristocracy, and in favour of whom?
A mere herd of men, who, by the showing of the very hero of the play, are
worthless, most worthless. ⁸⁵

But Knowles and Caius Gracchus differ from the Patricians and the Conservatives in identifying the defence of the people's rights as a self-evident and necessary goal:

CAIUS	If your liberties And rights are dear to you, be faithful to them. Fear not the senate; call upon the tribes; Be freemen – none will dare to make you slaves! ⁸⁶
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Maintaining 'Liberty' is the prime political imperative, in spite of the self-serving of politicians, and regardless of whether or not the people deserve it; in fact, the popular interest and welfare must be pursued and served, and their ancient rights restored, in spite of themselves and their fickleness, even unto the death of their champion. The people, as Rousseau taught in *The Social Contract*, must be forced to be free. ⁸⁷

Hazlitt writes that Knowles knew hardly a play or a poem: 'Ignorant alike of rules, regardless of models, he follows the steps of truth and simplicity.'⁸⁸ This is

⁸⁴ *Caius Gracchus*, III. 2. p. 38.

⁸⁵ Meeks, p. 140.

⁸⁶ *Caius Gracchus*, III. 3. p. 43.

⁸⁷ Rousseau, 'The Sovereign', in *The Social Contract*, <<http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon.htm>> [accessed 10/05/2005] (Book 1, Section 7).

⁸⁸ Hazlitt, 'Elia and Washington Irving' (p. 5 of 6).

disingenuous; it is part of Hazlitt's mythologizing Knowles as a 'common man' who wrote tragedies out of the natural promptings of his own heart:

Mr. Knowles is the first tragic writer of the age; in other respects he is a common man, and divides his time and his affections between his plots and his fishing-tackle, between the Muses' spring and those mountain-streams which sparkle like his own eye, that gush out like his own voice at the sight of an old friend.⁸⁹

In fact, Knowles spent a long time as a jobbing actor. We know he played Hamlet, Macbeth, Mercutio and Brutus, and his main fault as a playwright is his slavish following of Shakespeare. *Caius Gracchus* takes Shakespeare's Roman plays as its model. It has the fickle mob, the domineering mother, the protesting wife, the swift cutting between domestic and public scenes. Drusus' speech to the mob is an inversion of Mark Antony's over the body of Caesar, and the noblest Roman of all dies by his own hand rather than fall into the hands of his enemies or give them the credit of killing him.

One of Knowles' great theatrical strengths was his use of a pictorial, almost cinematic, technique whereby each scene is carefully composed to express visually the dynamics and relationships, and to complement the dialogue, so that the play proceeds, visually, by a series of staged pictures. When a scene opens the elements are arranged to show the nature of the characters and their relationships; the scene ends on a tableau that underlines the point to which those relationships have developed. The entire play moves to a final tableau that summarizes the action and the moral lessons that it contains. This was a crucial aspect of Knowles' work. Hazlitt says that 'all his situations form classic groups'.⁹⁰ *The Retrospective Review* writes an almost identical evaluation of Knowles' *Virgilius*, as 'the most exquisite succession of classic groups'.⁹¹ Macready's diary

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, (p. 6 of 6).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, (p. 5 of 6).

⁹¹ Meeks, p. 65.

shows how crucial this aspect was to the presentation of the drama when writing of the opening night of *Virginius*, when Kemble's voice failed: 'Kemble being so hoarse that not one word spoken in the loudest whisper could be heard; but the action of the scene told its story with sufficient distinctness to keep alive its interest.' ⁹²

The final scene of *Caius Gracchus* shows us how the method works. It opens in the Temple of Diana, to which the women from Gracchus' family have fled for safety. It is presided over by the statue of Diana, protector of women and the home, before which Caius Gracchus' distraught wife, Licinia, kneels as a suppliant, motionless as the statue itself, 'mute as silence, / And in so fix'd a stillness, you might ask, / Which is the marble?'⁹³. The domestic is the sphere of the women, the public that of the men, and this is an image of the domestic world under threat. '*A large Portal*' ⁹⁴ provides the link between the two worlds, an opening that threatens the women's safety by its gaping aperture. '*Numerous females*'⁹⁵ are distributed around, one of whom, not his mother, holds Gracchus' infant son. The dominant figure in the opening tableau, as she is in the scene and in the play, is Gracchus' mother, Cornelia. The only other male in the picture is the pageboy Lucius, who will exit and enter through the portal bearing the bad news to the women that the citizens are losing the battle to the Patricians. Throughout the play, Gracchus' wife has been attempting to detain him in the safety of the domestic world, while his mother has been encouraging him to embrace his public destiny, regardless of the cost. Man has a political duty, Cornelia says:

Hath he hands and feet? – Hath he brains and a heart? – Is he
A man? – What do you take him for? – Have men
No parts to play but lovers? – What? are they

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁹³ *Caius Gracchus*, V. 3. p. 56.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, V. 3. p. 56

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, V. 3. p. 56.

Not citizens as well? – Have they not crafts,
 Callings, professions? Women act their parts,
 Then, when they make their order'd houses know them.
 Men must be busy out of doors – must stir
 The city – yes make the great world aware
 That they are in it; for the mastery
 Of which they race, and wrestle, and such feats
 Perform, the very skies, in wonderment
 Echoing earth's acclaim, applaud them too.⁹⁶

The opening tableau shows that the mother has won the debate.

Gracchus himself flees into the temple, a final desperate flight from the dangers and viciousness of the public world, and utters a furious diatribe against his betrayal by the common people. Knowles' tragic heroes are human enough to be enraged by those who fail them:

May they remain the abject things they are,
 Begging their daily pittance from the hands
 Of tyrant lords that spurn them! May they crawl
 Ever in bondage and in misery,
 And never know the blessed rights of freemen!⁹⁷

He embraces his wife, child and mother, forming a 'classic grouping' as Hazlitt calls it, tells his mother to be 'a parent to my wife, a tutor to my boy. The lessons you did make me con, teach him – none else; he cannot learn better.'⁹⁸ Then he stabs himself beneath his cloak, and falls; Licinia throws herself on his body. Cornelia stands upright holding the child as the final tableau forms:

[A dagger drops from beneath CAIUS' robe – he falls dead – LICINIA, shrieking, throws herself on the body – CORNELIA, with difficulty, supports herself – the CONSUL and his troops are heard approaching – she makes a violent effort to recover her self-possession. Enter OPIMIUS and his party, with Guards, Lictors, &c. CORNELIA holds up the child in one hand, and with the other points

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 3. p. 12.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, V. 3. p. 57.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, V. 3. p. 57.

*to the body of CAIUS – OPIMIUS and the rest stand fixed in amazement – Flourish, and the curtain falls.]*⁹⁹

The final tableau has achieved the dramatic moment in which the domestic is indomitable, even in defeat, while the invading public victors are amazed and impotent, and the continuity of resistance is demonstrated and emphasised by the musical fanfare and the visual line connecting the dead Gracchus with his infant son through his indomitable mother.

This technique became almost commonplace in the later nineteenth-century, but Knowles seems to have been the one that developed it first. The use of the tableau became a favourite device of Victorian melodrama, rather than a verbal explanation, valediction, or summing up. The most vital tableau is the final one, that stops the play with an image that the audience carries away in its mind's eye: 'leaving this image on the soul', as the epilogue to *Virginius* describes it.¹⁰⁰ The device has been criticised as a weakness by some critics, but it would only seem so to a verbal-centred audience; to a visually literate audience raised on the cinema, for example, or familiar with the prints spilling out of the engraving presses, the tableau speaks volumes, and in the huge theatres of the Victorian age, where it was difficult to hear anyway, the visual summing up was the best way of driving the point home. Even in his early play *Brian Boromhe*, Knowles was working on this technique with his Irish mediaevalism. Verbal exposition clings to a convention of naturalism, but the pictorial tableau is a visual convention, acknowledging openly the artificial nature of theatrical presentation, and calling on the audience's familiarity with pictorial styles, widely disseminated by the popular prints. The action, in the above example flows towards the tableau, when time is arrested, and

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, V. 3, p. 58.

¹⁰⁰ 'Epilogue, by Barry Cornwall, Esq., Spoken by Miss Brunton', in *Dramatic Works of James Sheridan Knowles*, I. p. 111.

the conflicts are crystallized into a pictorial stasis, framed in the proscenium arch. The past and the failure of idealism are represented by the dead Gracchus, the personal cost by his grieving wife, the malevolent but thwarted authorities by Opimius and his men; these are balanced by the grieving but resolute women of the Gracchi, led by the *materfamilias* Cornelia, who, with her infant grandson in one arm, the other pointing to her dead son, holds the centre stage, links all the elements and represents the continuity and indomitability of resistance.

Caius Gracchus was premiered in the capital of Irish radicalism, Belfast, in 1815, the year of Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna, before transferring to Glasgow, the home of British Dissent, but it did not reach London until 1823, after the resounding success of Knowles' next play, *Virginus*, in 1820. Knowles returned to the subject of liberty and the tyranny of aristocratic rule in *Virginus*, but the context has changed in the play and in the country. The repression was stronger than ever, with the suspension of habeas corpus allowing imprisonment without trial, and the passing of the Six Acts outlawing assemblies, but there is in the play a subtly different sensibility. In *Virginus* rather than blaming the aristocrats unequivocally, the people are shown to be not just helpless, fearful and fickle victims, but complicit in their own oppression.

The play, like *Caius Gracchus*, is intensely political. It holds up the authorities and the Establishment as 'anything but friends to justice and their country',¹⁰¹ yet it also signals a new trimming and tacking by the upper-class, in which they disguise their true colours in order to hold their old place of privilege:

VIRGINIUS	I am not pleased when a patrician bends His head to a plebeian's girdle. Mark me! I'd rather he should stand aloof, and wear
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¹⁰¹ *Virginus*, I. 1. in *The Dramatic Works of James Sheridan Knowles*, I, p. 62.

His shoulder high.¹⁰²

Virginius is an honest soldier, a slightly pompous bourgeois, and he prefers honesty, and nailing the colours to the mast:

I favoured not this stealing
And winding into place. What he deserves,
An honest man dares challenge 'gainst the world.¹⁰³

Though the play is, like *Caius Gracchus*, avowedly for the people against the Patricians, the people are seen as the authors of their own misfortune; Virginius is exasperated with their lack of backbone and consistency. The Patricians and Appius, the villain of the play, despise them as a matter of course, in a way that recalls the *ancien régime* -- 'I do not want thee, Claudius, / To soil thy hand with their plebeian blood,' says Appius.¹⁰⁴ Their defenders have hardly a higher opinion of them. Dentatus, the old veteran soldier, is the main spokesman for this disdainful frustration: 'As to these curs, I question which I value less, their fawnings or their snarlings.'¹⁰⁵ While Knowles is a great champion of liberty, the play is certainly not a hymn to democracy. The lower classes in the play have been given the vote and have exercised their franchise, as in *Caius Gracchus*, to create tyrants by election:

DENTATUS More violence and wrong from these new masters of ours – our noble decemvirs – these demi-gods of the good people of Rome! No man's property is safe from them. Nay, it appears we hold our wives and daughters but by the tenure of their will. Their liking is the law. The senators themselves, scared at their audacious rule, withdraw themselves to their villas, and leave us to our fate.
[...]

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 62.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 63.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, III. 2. p. 83.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 65.

The gentle citizens – that are driven about by the decemvirs' lictors, like a herd of tame oxen, and with most beast-like docility, only low applauses to them in return.¹⁰⁶

Knowles has the soul, not of a Radical, but of an Anarchist: he profoundly mistrusts any form of authority. The lessons of the French Revolution lead Knowles to sound a warning about the need to exercise democracy carefully, and the readiness of the unscrupulous to manipulate the situation to their own advantage.

Like *Caius Gracchus*, the location of the play may be Rome, but the sensibility is contemporary. Critics at the time hailed *Virginius* as a new kind of tragedy, with its mingling of 'Roman grandiloquence and English domesticity'.¹⁰⁷ 'Knowles and Macready shared an interest in the portrayal of devoted fathers', says the *Dictionary of National Biography*,¹⁰⁸ and *Virginius* is a doting father; it is his only distinguishing characteristic. In other respects, he is interchangeable with Caius Gracchus or William Tell, but contemporary accounts tell of a complete and riveting performance by Macready in the role. The part was so highly thought of that it was also appropriated by Edwin Forrest, the greatest American actor of the age, and he and Macready toured rival productions of the play for many years. The characters struck a contemporary chord. Knowles' heroes are not historical figures but Victorian fathers or dutiful sons. *Virginius*' home, violated by the villainous consul Appius' lust for *Virginius*' daughter, is a bourgeois British household and Virginia is a typical Victorian heroine, sweet, wilting, without initiative or backbone. Knowles' heroes hold to a moral law opposed to their corrupt society, but it is the moral law of Radical bourgeois England. 'We have Roman tunics', wrote R.H.A. Horne in *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844), 'but a modern

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 2, p. 68.

¹⁰⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. HCG Matthew & Brian Harrison, 60 vols (Oxford: University Press, 2004), XXXI, p. 983.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 983.

English heart, – the scene is in the forum, but the sentiments those of the “Bedford Arms.”¹⁰⁹ Knowles, in all three of his ‘Liberty’ plays juxtaposes scenes of the domestic and the public. Morality, affection and apparent safety lie in the households of Gracchus, Virginius, and William Tell, but the vicious, amoral, aristocratically-controlled public world threatens, and then destroys this domestic idyll. The domestic is the micro-political, where morality is formed and then applied to the macro-political, the public world, as exemplified by Caius Gracchus and his mother, Virginius and his daughter, William Tell and his wife and son. Knowles explores the opposition between private morality and its public expression; where society is corrupt, it will destroy the idealist. Knowles’ plays show the danger of being a Radical idealist in a repressive society with an entrenched and violent ruling class; he will be abandoned from below and crushed from above. Only in *William Tell* does he survive, by which time, 1825, reform was at least a possibility, but there is an impression that Knowles is held back by the well-known story, and would just as willingly have sacrificed William Tell in the play, if it had been possible, in order to preserve his Radical purity.

The plays have no direct reference to the Irish situation, but they do reflect the situation in the entire United Kingdom, and embrace the plight of oppressed classes anywhere ground down by an aristocracy. Knowles intended his plays to have relevance regardless of location, and were directed at the rising middle class. ‘My plays were too liberal for the illiberal aristocracy of Ireland,’ he wrote, but were directed at a different sector: ‘My plays breathe the noble sentiments of the influential classes of Ireland.’¹¹⁰ He clearly believed that the aristocracy had had its day, but he found that they were still not without influence. His visit to his birthplace of Cork in 1834 was a financial disaster. The Catholic population and clergy received him warmly, but the gentry and nobility

¹⁰⁹ Parker, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ Parker, p. 15.

stayed away, in protest at his democratic views, and remembering his father's support for Catholic Emancipation. Knowles was humiliated, and bitterly complained about the lack of success 'which an Irishman meets with on his own ungrateful soil'.¹¹¹ He was compensated by a hugely successful tour of America later in the same year. In Britain, his work was heavily censored before performance, with references to 'liberty' expunged by the Lord Chamberlain, and all mention of tyranny removed at the orders of George IV. The excised text was re-introduced for the American productions, and for publication — a neat reverse of the present system whereby publication is considered more explosive than performance, an indication of the power of the theatre at the time, when illiteracy was widespread but theatre tickets were cheap.

In his third 'Liberty' play, *William Tell*, Knowles looks, not at internal oppression but at occupation by a foreign power, in this case Austria's occupation of Switzerland, but refrains still from direct mention of Ireland's case, unless it be the last speech with its anti-colonial sentiment:

TELL

We are free, my countrymen!
Our country is free! Austria, you'll quit a land
you never had a right to; and remember,
The country's never lost, that's left a son
To struggle with the foe that would enslave her.¹¹²

Knowles' plays are in fact becoming progressively more abstract. *William Tell* is more like a philosophical treatise than a play, rather like Schiller's play of the same name. The characters are schematic, interchangeable with their counterparts in his earlier plays. He tries to vary the drama by inserting a comic/romantic subplot, but it doesn't work, and Macready cut it for production, reducing the play from five acts to three.

¹¹¹ Meeks, p. 45.

¹¹² *William Tell*, V. 2. in *The Dramatic Works of James Sheridan Knowles*, II, p. 176.

In the first two 'liberty' plays, aristocratic centralism succeeds in eliminating the hero/outlaw but not the ideas that animate him, but in Knowles' *William Tell*, the bourgeois family men defending their hearths and homes overcome the aristocratic oppressor.

The subtext of Knowles' 'liberty' plays is the inescapability of politics – the interconnectedness of all strands of society, that there is no way of hiding from the movements of the macropolitical world and creating a domestic world where a private morality can hold sway. No private utopia can ever stand isolated within society – a message that is close to that of *The Plough and the Stars* a century later. The three plays argue that apparent liberty at the domestic level is an illusion when the body politic is sick. Knowles considers in *William Tell*, not class nor national liberation, but the winning of personal freedom. William Tell is free in the mountains but his freedom is destroyed by the arrival of the old man whose eyes have been gouged out by the tyrannous governor, Gesler. Gesler is imaged as a wolf, William Tell as an eagle, a symbol he shares with the spirit of liberty:

TELL

Scaling yonder peak,
I saw an eagle wheeling near its brow:
O'er the abyss his broad expanded wings
Lay calm and motionless upon the air,
As if he floated there without their aid,
By the sole act of his unlorded will,
That buoy'd him proudly up. Instinctively
I strung my bow; yet kept he rounding still
His airy circle, as in the delight
of measuring the ample range beneath,
And round about, absorb'd, he heeded not
The death that threaten'd him! – I could not shoot! –
'Twas liberty. I turn'd the shaft aside,
And let him soar away. ¹¹³

¹¹³ *William Tell*, I. 3, p. 123.

Charles Maturin's *Bertram* (1816) was supposed to be a new departure in English home-made tragedy, freed from the 'stupid German' influence of Schiller and Kotzebue, but it was in the opinion of Coleridge, the same old timber recycled.¹¹⁴ Knowles's success with *Caius Gracchus* and *Virginus* was that he was seen to eschew the "towering nonsense" of Maturin and Sheil,¹¹⁵ and create a new kind of tragedy of simple language and situations, actions and characters, which was more domestic, and more to the English taste. All three writers were Irish, of course, and it is ironic that for *William Tell* (1825) Knowles went back to Schiller, took his play, his republican outlook, and also his mystical, Germanic, Romantic awareness of landscape. In the plays of John O'Keeffe, the landscape was a bit player, in Maturin's *Bertram*, the wild setting had a substantial part in supporting the moods of the characters, but in *William Tell* it upstages everybody. The play is like Boucicault's in the precision and range of its stage-directions, and the over-bearing presences are the mountains. They dominate the stage, numinous and Sublime, alive with the spirit of 'Liberty.'

Schiller had written in 1795: 'It is not interaction with society, nor political revolution, which fulfil man as a human being, but the contemplation of great art alone.'¹¹⁶ He concluded that the greatest art was in Nature, and German Romantic painting is full of figures contemplating a landscape alive with meaning. Part of the Romantic Movement's intention was to restore, through art, some of the mystery whose removal had been the mission of the Enlightenment – *Entzauberung der Welt*. To the Romantics, in the contemplation of the great art and mystery of Nature they could lose themselves in

¹¹⁴ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 'Bertram,' in *Biographia Litteraria*, , < http://www.free-online-books.org/displaybook1.php?chapter_id=25&id=188 > [accessed 28/01/2005] (pp. 1-9).

¹¹⁵ 'Nineteenth-Century Drama', in *Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, <<http://www.bartleby.com/223/0805.html>> XIII, 8, [accessed 25/02/2005] (p. 1 of 3).

¹¹⁶ Friedrich Schiller, 'Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man', cited in Peter-Klaus Schuster, 'The Museum Island Berlin: A German Dream', in *A German Dream: Masterpieces of Romanticism from the Nationalgalerie Berlin*, Bernhard Maaz, ed. (Berlin: Nationalgalerie, 2004), p. 8.

Pantheism, like Wordsworth, or find the imprint of the greatest artist, to which Knowles' fervent religious convictions led him. To this end, *William Tell*, developing from his previous plays, is constructed as an exhibition of stage pictures to display this great art. *Brian Boroimhe* has tableaux of Irish mediaevalism; in his two Roman plays, Knowles used a series of domestic and public images based on nineteenth-century history and narrative paintings; in *William Tell* however, he cuts loose with the full panoply of the German Romantic.

Using scenery, music, sound and lighting-effects, he creates, with meticulous visual care, out of the Alpine setting, with its peaks, passes, glaciers, lakes, rivers and storms, a moving tableau, a diorama to harmonize with the lofty ideas of personal and public freedom. The first scene sets the tone:

*Tell's cottage on the right of a Mountain – a distant view of a Lake, backed by Mountains of stupendous height, their tops covered with snow, and lighted at the very points with the rising Sun – the rest of the distance being yet in shade – on one side a Vineyard. [...] The light gradually approaches the base of the mountains in the distance, and spreads itself over the lake and the valley.*¹¹⁷

In parallel, he developed, out of the Shakespearean soliloquy the vocal equivalent of a visual tableau, the verbal Aria. This is usually a hymn to 'Liberty' and the mountains that inspire it. It is intended, by its word-painting, to conjure up a verbal equivalent of the pictorial elements, and to lift the audience to a state of transcendental appreciation, to have them feel the touch of the Sublime. It was thought by his critics, though, that he had failed in this. *The Theatrical Times* wrote in 1847: 'he seldom or never touches the sublime'.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ *William Tell*, Stage directions, II, p.129 & 132.

¹¹⁸ Meeks, p. 85.

TELL Ye crags and peaks, I'm with you once again!
 I hold to you the hands you first beheld,
 To show they still are free. Methinks I hear
 A spirit in your echoes answer me,
 And bid your tenant welcome home again!
 Hail! – Hail! O sacred forms, how proud you look!
 How high you lift your heads into the sky!
 How huge you are! How mighty and how free!
 How do you look, for all your bared brows,
 More gorgeously majestic than kings
 Whose loaded coronets exhaust the mine!
 Ye are the things that tower – that shine – whose smile
 Makes glad – whose frown is terrible – whose forms,
 Robed or unrobed, do all the impress wear
 Of awe divine – whose subject never kneels
 In mockery, because it is your boast
 To keep him free! Ye guards of liberty,
 I'm with you once again! -- I call to you
 With all my voice! I hold my hands to you
 To show they still are free! I rush to you
 As though I could embrace you.¹¹⁹

This sort of aria, while it seems, to the modern eye and ear a piece of Romantic, Byronic excess, descending to pathos and soaring to absurdity, was the accepted style of the day, and to the actor it represented a challenge and an opportunity. Knowles obviously wrote it for someone skilled in oratory who could sweep an audience along without its pausing to analyse what he was actually saying; to the audience the Sublime was beyond rational analysis, a matter of feeling and intuition, not of reason; the truth was located within the individual's own emotions, and was released by passion and poetry.

The Sublime in Nature inspires the Swiss to freedom; the mountains call for revolt against the Austrian tyranny. It is not far from the pictoriality of Knowles' method in his earlier plays to the fusing of landscape with meaning, as he does in *William Tell*. The German Romantic painters showed him the way, and Knowles imbues the natural world, the mountains, the lakes, the falling waters, and the huge sky with the spirit of Liberty:

¹¹⁹ *William Tell*, I. 2. p. 123.

they are all free and teach men to be free. Counterpoised to this are the works of man, symbolised by towers and castles, which speak of imprisonment and bondage.

The free man rejoices in Nature, even in its most extreme manifestations, the oppressor cringes in terror. While Nature and the Mountains uplift the righteous with 'Liberty' their power is felt as an oppression by the villainous. Gesler the tyrant, when attacked by the storm, and assaulted by the Sublime, reacts with terror:

GESLER

My voice sounds weaker to mine ear! I've not
The strength to call I had; and through my limbs
Cold tremor runs, and sickening faintness seizes
On my heart.¹²⁰

*[He leans against a rock, stupefied with terror and exhaustion – it grows darker and darker – the rain pours down in torrents, and a furious wind arises – the mountain streams begin to swell and roar. ALBERT is seen descending by the side of one of the streams, which in his course he crosses with the help of his pole.]*¹²¹

What inspires the free man to rapture oppresses the oppressor almost to death. He is contrasted with William Tell's son, Albert who rejoices because 'God's in the storm'.¹²²

The similarities between Schiller's play and Knowles' are striking, particularly in their philosophy and in their evocation of a mystical landscape. But the differences are equally interesting. Nature, in Schiller's play, is characterised as a wild beast, an untameable, unstoppable entity, whose manifestations are symbolic of freedom. Knowles' Nature is more abstract, more spiritual. In Knowles, Nature is free, and calls men to freedom. This is present almost as a footnote in Schiller, when Tell characterises the mountains as: 'That house of freedom God hath built for us',¹²³ but the main focus in

¹²⁰ *William Tell*, III. 1. p. 141.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, III. 1. p. 141.

¹²² *Ibid.*, III. 1. p. 141.

¹²³ Freidrich Von Schiller, transl. by William F. Wertz, Jr, *Wilhelm Tell*, I. 3. in *Modern History Sourcebook*, Paul Halsall ed. (1999) <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1805schiller-willtell.html>>

Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* is on Nature's manifestations of its savage and irresistible power, in the storm, the avalanche, and the earthquake, used as symbols of the earth-shaking arrival of 'freedom.'

Schiller's play is very German, very Romantic, but Knowles has de-Germanized the play, removed its Napoleonic context, and taken out its pointed relevance to the fractured nature of the German-speaking countries and their humiliation by Bonaparte. Knowles, instead of a political context, has boosted, in his usual way, the contrast between the domestic and the public worlds. Schiller's is a very public play: he had it published (after his death) as a New Year's gift to the World for 1805.¹²⁴ Its main scene is a lengthy exposition of the clandestine setting up of a people's parliament under the unique phenomenon of a double lunar rainbow that occupies almost a whole act and finishes with a wonderful theatrical *coup*: *'Whilst they exit in greatest calm to three different sides, the orchestra breaks in with a magnificent flourish, the empty stage remains open for a time and displays the spectacle of the rising sun over the ice-capped mountains.'*¹²⁵ Knowles puts the emphasis on personal freedom within a domestic context. His argument in this play, like in *Caius Gracchus* and *Virginus*, is that such personal freedom is only possible within a broader context of public freedom from tyrannical interference.

This seems obvious enough to us after the terrible events of the twentieth century, but it was not so apparent in the early nineteenth. The early promise of democratic and revolutionary ideals had been corrupted by dictatorial repression and a war that spread around the world. Following the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15, the entire continent of

[accessed 14/03/2005] (p. 13 of 81).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, title page: 'A drama by Freidrich Von Schiller, New Year's Gift for 1805', (p. 1 of 81).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, stage direction, end of Act II. (p. 34 of 81).

Europe was re-arranged on the basis of aristocratic centralisation and a reactionary era followed, until 1848, in which democratic and reformist ideas were actively persecuted. This was, Sydney Smith wrote, 'an awful time for those who had the misfortune to entertain liberal opinions, and who were too honest to sell themselves'.¹²⁶ In this ruin of hope and liberty, many artists, writers and those of a reformist or democratic tendency turned inwards, and created a paradigm of domestic freedom and tranquillity that turned its back on the political repression of the time. The Biedermeier movement in Austria is a striking example of the tendency in Art, as is the music of Schubert, but it can also be traced in the literary concentration on individual relationships, the emphasis placed on friendship and the importance attached to the domestic and familial. When every country in western Europe was turned into a police state, social intercourse was restricted to a small circle of discreet and trusted friends.¹²⁷ Knowles, in his 'Liberty' plays, rejects this attitude in favour of the High Romantic ideals of individualism, political engagement, and passionate embracing of the mystical and Sublime through Nature.

This assertion and expression of freedom in Nature, visually and actively in its storms and sunrises, verbally in the ecstatic arias of William Tell, and in the overall rhythm of the plot that surges irresistibly towards the achievement of liberty, rejects, by dwarfing all men to the same size, the claim of an occupying power, or a ruling class, to supremacy, and to the exclusive rights to power and the fruits of power. In a sense both Knowles and Richard Brinsley Sheridan in *Pizarro* are embracing the Hobbes/Locke doctrine of the power invested inalienably in the people, and devolved by them on to the authorities, which was reversed by the Congress of Vienna. This is the underlying

¹²⁶ Parker, p. 15.

¹²⁷ Aaron Green, 'The Rise of the Middle Class and the Related Works of Schubert,' <<http://classicalmusic.about.com/od/romanticperiod/a/aabeidermeier.htm>> [accessed 29/04/2005] (p.2 of 4)

republicanism in both plays, but it is also evident in their striving for the Sublime. Price says in his introduction to his edition of the plays that in Sheridan's *Pizarro*, 'He aimed at, and for many of his contemporaries achieved, the sublime.'¹²⁸ The Sublime is essentially democratic; it is available to all, and can be felt by the soul of each individual. It asserts the centrality of individual experience, and the supremacy of the individual over the group. It proclaims the irresistibility and inevitability of individual passions, because they express powerfully the urgings of Nature, and through Nature the Divine is expressed. It is the most selfish of doctrines, unless leavened with the idea of all men as brothers. - the *fraternité* to balance the *liberté*. Bertram and Pizarro express the *liberté*, William Tell, Gracchus and Virginius the *fraternité*. In *William Tell*, too, is rejected the suppression of the ancient rights of the common people, reminiscent of the arguments of Molyneux, and the right of one country to occupy and rule another, which resonated in America as it did in Ireland.

William Tell is Knowles' most complete and mature statement of his 'Liberty' theme. It was also his favourite role while he remained acting. After a severe illness in 1844 he gave up the theatre, became a Baptist preacher and retired to a Scottish island where he could live in freedom and the contemplation of God's Artwork. He also wrote two rather poor novels, and some virulently anti-Catholic pamphlets. He later based himself at Torquay, and lived out the remainder of his life as an itinerant preacher. In 1848 he was given a state pension as a poet of national standing, and had his name go forward as a possible candidate for Poet Laureate in opposition to Tennyson.

During his career, he visited Dublin and Belfast on many occasions and performed in his own plays and popular classics; Cork made its amends for the debacle of 1834 with a

¹²⁸ Price, introd. to *Sheridan's Plays* (Oxford: University Press, 1950), p. xxx.

civic reception and banquet in 1862. Knowles' 'Liberty' plays have no direct reference to Ireland at all, but throughout his life, he rejoiced in the nickname of 'Paddy' Knowles, and his acting was often criticised for the prominence of his Irish accent. And he did continue the Irish tradition of bending language into the service of poetry. He has two modes of language. One has a Wordsworthian simplicity and directness; 'Is it a voice, or nothing, answers me?/ I hear a sound so fine – there's nothing lives /twixt it and silence!'¹²⁹ The other is operatic Romantic rant, as it now sounds to us. He has also the interesting peculiarity of investing the dialogue of his peasants, soldiers and labourers with poetry. He was criticised for putting, in *William Tell*, poetry in the mouths of peasants, by critics who took *Lyrical Ballads* too literally, and put the passion for truth to nature over poetic truth. *Fraser's Magazine* wrote in 1836:

He suffers not his peasants to wear their native plainness, but they must speak sentiment, and talk love, whether married or single. His hero must apostrophise clouds and rocks and boast of freedom and talk politics, regardless of the fact that to a mountain people rocks and clouds are things familiar, and excite no wonderment, no passionate appeals.¹³⁰

It is part of Knowles' egalitarianism to believe peasants in a drama should feel as keenly and express as poetically or coherently as aristocrats; theatrical conventions bend easily enough to accommodate such sleight-of-hand. *William Tell* is a peasant, but he is an aristocrat of feeling, and expresses his reactions to the world in the high language of poetry. It is tempting to see Knowles' pioneering work in this area influencing Synge, O'Casey, or Lady Gregory to blend poetry with dialect to create their unique versions of peasant speech.

¹²⁹ *Virginus*, V. 2. p. 106.

¹³⁰ *Fraser's Magazine*, XIII, (April 1836), p. 459, in Meeks, p. 107.

Knowles' abstract hymns to liberty and personal freedom from moral, political or social oppression by an occupying power or an entrenched and recalcitrant ruling class touched a nerve in Ireland, England, Scotland and America. Knowles' idea of liberty has a modern ring; it is not political freedom but the absence of oppressive tyranny, the right to go about one's private, domestic and familial life without interference by overlords, hereditary or elected. His anarchist spirit is well aware that toppled tyranny will often be replaced by another political system, as in *Caius Gracchus* and *Virginus*, that is as bad as the system overthrown. The failure and corruption of the French Revolution permeated his entire generation of Radicals, but it is the *idea* of freedom that is felt to be important. In Knowles' plays, ideas are allocated an emotional power and impact that they enjoyed before the French Revolution, but were not to enjoy again until the heyday of Nationalism and Socialism. In his plays, the radical programme of the Revolutionaries was kept alive, nurtured and propagated by the most popular art and entertainment form of the day. The tension between an undeserving, repressive Ascendancy and a buried, oppressed mass of the people was constantly articulated, keeping up the pressure of the time, until the idea of a separate nationalism gave it a visible form.

Chapter VIII

Picturesque Ruins:

Boucicault's Irish Ascendancy

The Colleen Bawn; Arrah-na-Pogue; The Shaughraun; Robert Emmet.

In his Irish plays Boucicault tapped into a sort of theatrical tourism, exploiting the advances made in lighting, scenic design and spectacular effects to create images of place, and exploiting the vogue for visiting romantic scenery such as Killarney, the Lake District or the Alps. David Krause writes of *The Colleen Bawn*: 'Much of the play's attraction lay in the romanticized background of Irish country life, and he reproduced it with sensational scenery, accompanying music, and songs.'¹ The scenery assumes a vital importance as part of the theatrical reference in Boucicault's Irish plays - the Lakes of Killarney in *The Colleen Bawn*, the Wicklow Mountains in *Arrah na Pogue* - and it achieves its apotheosis in *The Shaughraun*. That play is set, not in some well-known tourist destination, but in the fairly anonymous attractions of Sligo. It is a generalized, idealised, romantic Ireland with no immediately recognizable image from popular lithography; so in this play the landscape is released from preconceived ideas and becomes an active player, almost a separate character, and one that exercises a considerable influence over the plot and the characters. It takes the role of a mystic monitor of events and inspirer of the protagonists, and it also participates in the action. The landscape hides the hero, provides escape-routes, supports the oppressed heroines surreptitiously with food, (by way of the Shaughraun), confuses the soldiery, curses the usurpers and restores the rightful owners to their proper place. Finally, it kills the villain. A powerful current of mystic unity between people and land informs this play and its companions. At the centre of the three plays lies the question of land, just as it was latent in O'Keeffe's *Wicklow Mountains* and dominates the work of John B. Keane one

¹ David Krause, 'The Theatre of Dion Boucicault', in *The Dolmen Boucicault*, ed. by David Krause (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1964), p. 32.

hundred years later. Who owns the land? as Richard Murphy asks.² Squire Kinchela in *The Shaughraun* invokes the landscape early on against the foreign soldier, Molineux: 'The devil guide him to pass the night in a bog-hole up to his neck.'³ But the landscape only half-obliges: it teases and harries Molineux, but keeps him on a leash: 'I was nearly smothered in a bog. [...] Instead of going straight home, I have been revolving in an orbit round that house by a kind of centrifugal force,' he says.⁴ It assists the characters in their efforts to preserve Ffolliott, its rightful owner, and also curses the usurpers of his patrimony; the alienated landscape partaking of the alienation of its owners:

FATHER DOLAN Oh! Beware Kinchela! When these lands were torn from
 Owen Roe O'Neal in the old times, he laid his curse on the spoilers, for
 Suil-a-more was the dowry of his bride, Grace Ffolliott. Since then
 many a strange family have tried to hold possession of the place; but
 every year one of them would die – the land seemed to swallow them
 up one by one. Till the O'Neals and the Ffolliotts returned none other
 thrived on it

KINCHELA Sure that's the raison I want Arte O'Neal for my wife. Won't
 that keep the ould blood to the fore.⁵

The political and physical landscape interact with each other. The nature of the coast of Sligo aids the flight or landing of fugitives; the successful homing of Ffolliott leads to a cleansing of the political system and the restoration of the land to its rightful owners. The romanticising of the landscape is reflected in the romanticising of the Gentry who

² Richard Murphy, *The Battle of Aughrim*, in *New Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 47:
 "Who owns the land where musketballs are buried
 in blackthorn roots on the esker, the drained bogs
 where sheep browse, and credal war miscarried?"

³ Dion Boucicault, *The Shaughraun*, I. 1. in *Selected Plays of Dion Boucicault*, ed. by Andrew Parkin, Irish Drama Selection 4 (Gerrard's Cross Buckinghamshire: Colin Smyth, 1987 & Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), p. 263.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 2. p. 268.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 265.

are the rightful possessors. The rightful owners are oppressed, and the landscape is in the hands of the oppressors; the good are downtrodden, and the unjust thrive.

The first scene of *The Shaughraun* is masterly in its weaving together of these strands. We open on a harmonious scene - a pretty girl in a dramatic landscape, churning and singing, a picture-postcard of romantic Ireland: *The ruins of Suil-a-more Castle cover a bold headland in the half distance – the Atlantic bounds the picture – Sunset – Music. Claire Ffolliott at work at a churn.*⁶ But the playwright is playing with us. He is evoking our received knowledge of theatrical conventions and the iconography of landscape to make us totally misinterpret the scene: the girl is one of the aristocracy, play-acting at being a milkmaid, as we find out when Mrs. O'Kelly enters and speaks to her deferentially. Then the English captain, Molineux, appears, and the audience join Claire Ffolliott in trapping him in exactly the same mistake, but there is unease in our laughter. He, like us, is seduced by the physical beauty, and blind to the political squalor, until Claire spells it out for him:

CLAIRE Do you see that ruin yonder! Oh – 'tis the admiration of the traveller, and the study of painters, who come from far and near to copy it. It was the home of my forefathers when they kept open house for the friend – the poor – or the stranger. The mortgagee has put up a gate now, so visitors pay sixpence a head to admire the place, and their guide points across to this cabin where the remains of the ould family, two lonely girls, live. God knows how – you ask leave to kill game on Suil-a-more and Keim-an-eigh. (*Crosses to the dairy window*) Do you see that salmon? It was snared last night in the Pool-a-Bricken by Conn, the Shaughraun. He killed those grouse at daylight on the side of Maurnturk. That's our daily food, and we owe it to a poacher.

MOLINEUX You have to suffer bitterly indeed for ages of family imprudence and the Irish extravagance of your ancestors.

ARTE Yes, sir, the extravagance of their love for their country and the imprudence of their fidelity to their faith.

MOLINEUX But surely you cannot be without some relatives!

⁶ *The Shaughraun*, stage directions for I. 1. p. 259.

CLAIRE I have a brother – the heir to this estate
 MOLINEUX Is he abroad?
 CLAIRE Yes, he is a convict working out his sentence in Australia.
 MOLINEUX Oh, I beg pardon. I did not know. (To ARTE) Have you any
 relatives?
 ARTE Yes, I am the affianced wife of her brother!⁷

Boucicault performs the same undercutting move at the start of each of his Irish trilogy. In *The Colleen Bawn* we are shown the scene of the Big House on the shores of the Lakes of Killarney, hear twenty seconds of music from the house, *seven bars before curtain*⁸ and see the green signal light winking across the lake, an idyllic scene full of romantic promise. It is soon shattered by the apparently illicit love-affair of Hardress Cregan, his mercenary mother in pursuit of an advantageous marriage for her son, as well as the first intimation of violence and deformity from Cregan and Danny Mann. The romantic illusion is created and collapsed all within the first two pages of the text.

The romantic setting of the Wicklow Mountains is created in the opening scene of *Arrah-na-Pogue* in a stage direction as tight and evocative as a Japanese haiku:

*Glendalough; Moonlight. The Ruins of St. Kevin's Abbey, the Round Tower, the Ruined Cemetery, the Lake and Mountains beyond; Music. Beamish Mac Coul discovered.*⁹

If this were a film the camera would linger on it; if it were a novel or a poem it would be described in great detail; here it is masterly in its romantic abbreviation. The intention is clear: the character is given romantic status by the presence of great dramatic scenery and is obviously an aristocrat. We find out once the scene starts that he is also an outlaw engaged in armed robbery.

⁷ *The Shaughraun*, I. 1. p. 261.

⁸ *The Colleen Bawn* I. 1. in Parkin, *Selected Plays of Dion Boucicault*, p. 193.

⁹ *Arrah-na-Pogue*, stage direction, I. 1. in David Krause, ed., *The Dolmen Boucicault*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1964), p. 113.

In each of the three plays, then, we are confronted with spectacular scenery, and embedded in that scenery is an attractive member of the Ascendancy who is in trouble. This is the double edge, attractiveness and vulnerability, that Boucicault uses to delineate the Ascendancy and their place in nineteenth century Irish society. The Ascendancy, he shows us, is a picturesque ruin.

Boucicault is, like his predecessors, a myth-maker, and has created for his Irish plays an Ascendancy that never existed. Just as he romanticises the landscape, he fictionalises the gentry who are the human embodiments of the romantic landscape. He shows us an Ascendancy that might have evolved if the country had never been conquered by the English. His gentry all have Irish names: Cregan, MacCoul, O'Neal, O'Grady, or at least Old English ones: Ffolliott, Chute. In the wedding scene from *The Colleen Bawn*, the guests are Hyland Creagh, Bertie O'More, Kathleen Creagh, Patsie O'More; they are obviously of the same race as the peasantry and the rising bourgeoisie who want to marry into them; the differences, as in Tolstoy, are class ones. There are two sets of signifiers in *The Colleen Bawn*: peasant-signifiers – brogue, Irish words, songs and music, 'smell of tobacco [...] and the fumes of whiskey punch'¹⁰, and gentry-signifiers – 'getting clear of the brogue, and learning to do nothing,' as Eily says.¹¹ For the purposes of the play there are no religious or racial barriers between the aristocrats and the villain, Corrigan, either. This neatly avoids 'The National Question' and gives a clean line to the conflict, uncluttered by any reference to national tribalism or ambiguities; the heroes and villains are all Irish. It is an idealised social landscape designed not to inflame Irish audiences nor offend English ones; the play even

¹⁰ *The Colleen Bawn*, I. 3. p. 209.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I. 3. p. 207.

succeeded in amusing Queen Victoria, who saw it performed a number of times. The scene in which Cregan berates Eily about her brogue shows how deep is the class divide that has to be bridged for a happy ending, but the joke about Anne Chute reverting to brogue – ‘When I am angry the brogue comes out, and my Irish heart will burst through manners, and graces, and twenty stay-laces’¹² – shows that the gentry and the peasants are not so far apart. The tension between standard English and brogue that had been such a feature of Irish plays is expanded in a sinister fashion in the misapprehension that causes the central action – the murder of the Colleen Bawn. The play hinges on a unity of intent but a confusion of language: Danny seeks verification: ‘I’m to *make* away with her then,’ and Mrs. Cregan either deliberately or genuinely misunderstands: ‘Yes, yes – *take* her away – away with her!’¹³ The Pontius Pilate-like biblicality of the exhortation implicates her, at least in the intention of the crime.

The English are removed from the plays, apart from certain sympathetic presences, Captain Molineux, in *The Shaughraun*, or Lord Kilwarden in *Robert Emmet*. In fact, it is left entirely open as to what nationality Kilwarden is, he could easily be Irish, and Major Sirr is made an honorary Irishman. Boucicault has created an indigenous, almost closed world of Irish aristocrats, villains and peasants; Molineux is the only significantly English character, as if the entire history of seven hundred years of conquest and colonisation, oppression and dispossession had never taken place. The plays occupy a temporal and metaphoric space in which history may be stated but not shown – history as talk, or as story. There is a lot of talk in *The Shaughraun* about injustice, but the talk refers to past deeds such as the exiling of Ffolliott, or to ancient wrongs, such as the

¹² *Ibid.*, II. 2. p. 216.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II. 2. p. 220.

confiscation of the land. The first is cured by the magnanimity of the Queen, the second obscured by an equally predatory subsequent confiscation by an Irishman. There are two parallel actions at work: one is the verbal one lamenting the wrongs of Ireland, but the physical action goes in a different direction. The play enacts a reconciliation, through a line of events, from the pardon of Ffolliott, via the uniting of the English army with the Irish gentry and peasants to produce justice and punish the villain. The villains are not English; English law is culpably foolish but it is executed by an Irishman, Kinchela, who is a magistrate and abuses the law to get hold of Ffolliott's land - a device, as Lecky points out, that laid the foundation of most of the great Irish estates.¹⁴

What this leaves is a cleaner concentration on class issues, as it was with O'Keeffe and Knowles, and Boucicault deals with these quite subtly.

Boucicault habitually undersells himself. He says in his preface to the 1841 edition of *London Assurance*:

It will not bear analysis as a literary production. In fact, my sole object was to throw together a few scenes of a dramatic nature; and therefore, I studied the stage rather than the moral effect.¹⁵

¹⁴'Every man's enjoyment of his property became precarious, and the natives learned with terror that law could be made in a time of perfect peace, and without any provocation being given, a not less terrible instrument than the sword for rooting them out of the soil.' Lecky, I, p. 28.

¹⁵ Dion Boucicault, *London Assurance*, ed. by Ronald Eyre and Peter Thompson (London: Methuen, 1971) p. xxi.

His plays, he would have us believe, have no literary pretensions at all, but he is forestalling criticism by being pre-emptively modest. His characters are real, his dialogue sparkles; he was a master of theatricality, an expert manipulator of audiences, and a skilled director of thoughts and feelings into the channels he has prepared. He stands at the centre of the Irish theatrical canon. Everything seems to lead up to him, and all subsequent developments derive from him.'

His play *The Octoroon*, (1859) dealt with slavery, an incendiary subject for its American audience. The play was what Boucicault called: 'the actual, the contemporaneous, the photographic'.¹⁶ In fact the villain is trapped by the use of a camera, and contemporaneous it certainly was. It opened on the 6th of December 1859, four days after John Brown was hanged for his abortive attack on the Harper's Ferry arsenal, which signalled the start of the hostilities that led to the American Civil War. Boucicault performed a delicate balancing act in the play to appease both sides of his divided audience. Joe Jefferson, a leading actor in the play's premiere, explains how he did it:

Boucicault had thrown a bone to both sides: the handling of the plot was pro-northern, but the treatment of the characters was pro-southern. For the plot dealt mainly with the victimized slave girl Zoe who is sold on the block to the highest bidder, thus eliciting strong anti-slavery sympathies; while in the alignment of the characters, the southerners were on the whole gallant gentlemen who remained loyal to their slaves, thus gratifying the pro-slavery forces.¹⁷

Through the character of Zoe and the others in this play he explored issues of class and oppression, and learned valuable lessons which he applied to his Irish plays. He learned how to depict the plight of a downtrodden race without at the same time showing their

¹⁶ Peter Thompson, intro. to *London Assurance*, p. ix.

¹⁷ David Krause, 'The Theatre of Dion Boucicault: a Short View of His Life and Art', in *The Dolmen Boucicault*, p. 26.

oppressors as monsters of melodrama. He had travelled extensively in the Southern states and was impressed, as were most people, by the attractiveness and graciousness of a society that was maintained by the institution of slavery. In his Irish plays, he employs the same tactic. He makes his Ascendancy heroes attractive, noble creatures, but he undercuts them by making them complete fools. These Ascendancy heroes – Beamish MacCoul, Hardress Cregan, Robert Ffolliott, Robert Emmet, are dashing but not too bright. This may be partly because Boucicault never played these characters himself; he left them to the juvenile leads, and so had very little interest in creating powerful characters who could upstage him, but there is more to it than that. In each play, our hero stands at the centre of the plot, which they kick-start by some act of *unthinking* stupidity, which immediately spins out of their control until they are rescued by their peasant ‘inferiors’. The main characteristic of the Ascendancy heroes in the four plays is thoughtless, careless idiocy; their inability to think rather than feel causes endless trouble for all around them, from which their lower-class followers must rescue them.

Robert Emmet wants to lead the masses to their deaths, for a republic, an abstraction, when what the people want from their efforts is material gain and a bit of excitement – looting, in the case of Emmet's followers. What Boucicault does is identify Emmet as part of the Anglo-Irish ruling class, but allows him to become an outlaw, like those in Knowles' plays, by dissenting from his patrimony and embracing the abstract idea of independence. It is never stated what it is independence from. ‘The Castle’ is the abstract oppressor, not the English, who are never mentioned. Emmet does not depart mentally from his class for a moment; the redistribution of wealth and land is never considered by Ascendancy rebels, and Emmet fervently opposes a redistribution of

wealth by looting. Class solidarity ensures that valiant efforts are made by his classmates from College to save him, but not to save any of the other rebels. His invincible and arrogant nobility is too strong for them, however. Like Rollo in Sheridan's *Pizarro*, Emmet is designed to a Romantic template, to appeal to a romantic audience. He sees himself in messianic terms, and invokes the spirit of Cortes, of Napoleon, even of Cromwell:

It is the inexorable fate of all the saviours of the people! Oh, ye spirits! You immortal band of heroes who suffered for your faith! Bodyguard of Him who died for the human race! Accept into your ranks the humble life of one, who, loving his native land not wisely, but too well, followed in your footsteps upward to the Throne where sit the Eternal Trinity of Truth, Light and Freedom! ¹⁸

Because he is betrayed by those around him, not by his intrinsic flaws, Emmet is not a tragic figure. The ambiguity of the character fractures the play dramatically: his rhetorical evocation of Irish nationalist sentiments does not compensate for his endemic obtuseness. Boucicault was the expert manipulator of audiences, and the fact that he never revived the piece indicates a failure. Since the play is spectacular and employs a variety of startling stage effects, the lack of success may have been caused in England by the Irish nationalist sentiment, but that would go down well in America, so it must be the failure of the central character to engage the sympathy of the audience. Emmet is designed for an expatriate Irish-American audience, with its vague hymns to Independence, like a Hollywood film of the nineteen-forties or fifties invoking the joys of Democracy, but the character is less appealing than the sentiments.

¹⁸ Boucicault, *Robert Emmet*, III. 2. p. 369, in *Selected Plays of Dion Boucicault*, ed. by Andrew Parkin.

The character of Emmet does not work. For all his high patriotic talk, he is just a talker. Like all of Boucicault's Ascendancy heroes, he is in the grip of events all through the play; he takes no initiative, but he is blown along by conspiracy and betrayal, or manipulated by his underlings. He is never the huntsman, always the quarry, and the hunting metaphor is the dominant one: Major Sirr is the hound.¹⁹ The characters talk much of traps, and being caught in them.²⁰

Emmet was an incompetent, attractive fantasist in reality, and this is recreated in the play. His foolishness seeps through his nobility. He brings the whole plan of the conspiracy in his coat pocket when he goes to visit Sarah Curran, and leaves it behind when surprised by the authorities. When he escapes on Major Sirr's horse, he never thinks to ask how the informer, Quigley, came to be at the door holding a horse for him; he takes it as his due. He leaves his coat behind him again when he goes to hide in the well, expecting his servants to look after it, and leaves on the table a letter in his own handwriting with the ink still wet.²¹ He thinks a revolution can be detonated without any collateral damage. On the death of Kilwarden, he laments: 'The coward who struck this good man down planted his steel in the bosom of his country. Ireland was murdered by that blow,'²² although he had just ordered an innocent man to be shot for the crime. This aspect is too obvious in the play to be ignored. Boucicault seems to be conducting an experiment: can he portray an Ascendancy fool as a romantic hero? Can the bright cloak of language and the vividness of stagecraft mollify the upperclass stupidity? The failure of the play would seem to indicate that it did not. Its debut in America was

¹⁹ *Robert Emmet* III. 2. 2, p. 372.

²⁰ *Robert Emmet*, IV. 2. p. 379, & III. 5. p. 385.

²¹ *Robert Emmet*, III. 2. p. 372.

²² *Robert Emmet*, II. 5. p. 365.

overshadowed by Cleveland's election as President on the same night, and it was not subsequently revived.

Patterns in a writer's work are often easier to discern in their lesser works, and Emmet is the most extreme of Boucicault's upper-class idiots, but not by any means the only one. Beamish MacCoul, in *Arrah-na-Pogue*, may be a rebel, but he, like Emmet, still has no doubt of his place in the power structure. When he decides to save Arrah he is confident of his ability to go right to the top: 'I will go at once to the Secretary of State at Dublin, and lay the whole history of my folly before him. Surely he will spare Arrah's life if I surrender mine.'²³

The Ascendancy characters are attractive, but not very clever, and while the plot revolves around them, they have no control over it. The nub of the action in *Arrah-na-Pogue* is Beamish's generous and foolish gesture in giving to Arrah the money he has taken from the rent-collector. It is that piece of unthinking generosity that launches the plot, and from that point he has landed everyone else in trouble and the hunt is up. The hunting motif I noted in *Robert Emmet* is repeated here. 'They are hunting the life out of him,' says Arrah of Beamish,²⁴ and the Sergeant throws Feeny out of the jail when he is annoying Shaun the Post: 'This is a man in trouble, and not a badger in a hole to be baited by curs like you,'²⁵ and the hunt for Beamish MacCoul forms the backdrop to the entire play. Mrs. Cregan in *The Colleen Bawn* also says, 'the hunters are after my blood,'²⁶ and calls Corrigan 'a dark bloodhound.'²⁷

²³ *Arrah-na-Pogue*, II. 1. in *The Dolmen Boucicault*, p. 139.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 4. p. 131.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, II. 3. p. 143.

²⁶ *The Colleen Bawn*, III. 5. p. 246.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, page 247.

Apart from his impulsive stupidity, and his assumption of his natural right to ask favours of the authorities he has sworn, as a United Irishman, to destroy, there is little to reprehend in Beamish MacCoul. He is, as Krause observes, 'a dashing hero who does little besides dash'.²⁸ It is worth noting however, that when MacCoul receives his own pardon, it is not he, but O'Grady, who remembers that Shaun the Post is waiting to be hanged in the morning as a result of MacCoul's folly, and dashes off to save him.

Robert Ffolliott in *The Shaughraun* is a man who is tied in a straitjacket of his own honour. He chooses to die rather than force Fr. Dolan to tell a lie by concealing his whereabouts - he cannot do a dishonourable thing even to save his life. He is also a gullible fool: he swallows without question the cock-and-bull story that the villain Kinchella tells him:

KINCHELLA My devotion to you and the precious charge you left in my care exposes me to suspicion. I am watched, and to preserve my character for loyalty, I am obliged to put on airs – Oh! I'm your mortal enemy, mind that. [...] Every man woman an' child in the County Sligo believes it, and hate me. I've played my part so well that your sister an' Miss O'Neal took offence at my performance. [...] Yes! ho! ho! they actually believe I am what I am obliged to appear, and they hate me cordially. I'm the biggest blackguard -

ROBERT You! my best friend!²⁹

In addition to his gullibility, he manages to drop and lose the gun that Kinchella gave him to aid his escape. For a convicted Fenian desperado, he is remarkably incompetent; it is part of Boucicault's ameliorating process to gloss over the objectives, methods, and ruthlessness of the I.R.B..

²⁸ Krause, 'The Theatre of Dion Boucicault', in *The Dolmen Boucicault*, p. 34.

²⁹ *The Shaughraun*, II. 3. p. 294.

Hardress Cregan in *The Colleen Bawn* is the least attractive and at the same time the most interesting of Boucicault's Ascendancy heroes. Boucicault writes him as a weak character, who lives under the domination of his mother. He is a hypocrite in opposing the proposals of the squireen, Corrigan, to join the family by marrying the mother, while all the time he is himself married to the peasant Eily O'Connor. Cregan's clandestine marriage can only be viewed as an act of extreme foolhardiness. The Cregan estate is like all the estates in the plays, encumbered by previous mismanagement. The flight of a large number of the Ascendancy to London after the Act of Union, and the huge extra expenditure involved, put an unbearable burden on the estates that were the only source of income they had. In order to support the far more expensive lifestyle in London they resorted to rackrenting, mortgaging and remortgaging their estates, without, in most cases, any reinvestment in the land in order to secure the continuance of that income. This is so much to be expected that Captain Molineux assumes it of the Ffolliotts in *The Shaughraun*: 'You have to suffer bitterly indeed for ages of family imprudence, and the Irish extravagance of your ancestors.'³⁰ In *The Colleen Bawn*, Hardress Cregan has ignored his responsibilities, has followed his feelings and pursued his pleasures by marrying a peasant, and so cut himself off from being in any position to rectify the family fortunes through an advantageous marriage, the only means available to an encumbered estate with a presentable heir.

In *Arrah-na-Pogue* the O'Grady is slightly more useful than the Ascendancy men in the other plays. He cannot save Shaun the Post from being sentenced to death, but his heart is revolted by it. He is disdainful of the law, but helpless in its grip, constrained by his

³⁰ *The Shaughraun*, I. 1. p. 262.

position into doing his duty and implementing it, however unwillingly: 'It's a hard duty that obliges a gentleman to put a rope around that boy's neck, while dignity forbids him to say that he's mighty sorry for it.'³¹ This play is unusual in that the day is saved, not by the cunning of the rogue, but by the intervention of the paternalistic authorities, and their good offices secured by close contact with the local gentry. MacCoul and O'Grady behave well, if not too cleverly in the case of MacCoul, and with limited effectiveness, in the case of O'Grady. Shaun the Post and O'Grady are like two sides of a coin, in their cast of mind and their use of language as a weapon and shield. O'Grady wants to let Shaun off on grounds of 'the eloquence of the defence,'³² and indicates that they are of like mind: 'Asy, Major, what would you do if a man offered to lay a hand on the woman you loved? Be the powers, I'd have brained him first and warned him afterwards.'³³ He is in marked contrast to Major Coffin who is, in O'Grady's opinion:

A kind-hearted gentleman, who would cut more throats on principle and firm conviction than another blackguard would sacrifice to the worst passions of his nature. If there is one thing that misleads a man more than another thing, it is having a firm conviction about anything.³⁴

That last sentence with its deft shuffling of rhythm, cadence and meaning shows O'Grady in the direct line of descent from the 'Hibernian' gentlemen of the eighteenth-century stage. This descent is nowhere clearer than in the trial scene in *Arrah-na-Pogue*. The linguistic games that Boucicault plays, the skill in verbal fencing, the witty inversion of accepted moral and legal truths, and the obvious moral superiority that is signified by linguistic superiority, link directly back to the eloquent Hibernian

³¹ *Ibid.*, II. 4. p. 154.

³² *Arrah-na-Pogue*, II. 4. p. 153,

³³ *Ibid.*, I. 4. p. 135.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II. 2. p. 140.

gentlemen of Macklin, Sheridan, and the eighteenth century, and point forward to the polished paradoxes of Oscar Wilde.

The function of the Gentlemen in the plays is to walk nobly and stupidly into traps set by crafty bourgeoisie out of which their even craftier peasant followers have to extricate them. This collaboration was remarked on, in a prefiguring of post-colonial theory, by the commentators around the end of the eighteenth century as a sort of back-stairs conspiracy, a clandestine marriage of convenience to both parties. The gentry are relegated or exalted to the status of useless figureheads who have no use in the real rough-and-tumble world. It is possible to see these plays as a satirical comment on the nature and usefulness of what can be called conventional Victorian morality. Our heroes are fine examples of the Rugby sort of virtues, who cannot do a dishonourable thing, even to save their lives. They seem to be held up for admiration, an affirmation of the manly virtues of honour and truth, but these virtues are demonstrated, in the plays, to be dependent on cunning and deceit, which their subordinates have to apply in such a way as to leave their masters unsullied and ignorant of how it is done.

The subtext is that the Ascendancy, though still a very attractive set, have become useless except as an ornament. The struggle, is, prophetically, between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, with the aristocracy as the king in this chess game, with severely limited mobility and power, but providing the necessary reference point. This sense of the Gentry as ornamental outlives the potency, and outlasts the existence, of the class itself. It is the aspect that still attracts the characters in the plays of M.J. Molloy, Ooshla in *The Paddy Pedlar*, or Sanbatch in *The Wood of the Whispering*, and causes them to

lament, almost surreptitiously, the passing of a system that oppressed them brutally. All that is left to them is 'a miserable bare country with all its fine mansions and woods destroyed.'³⁵ Likewise, a benevolent unreality hangs over Boucicault's Irish plays. A radiance is felt by all below them to emanate from the Ascendancy. In the peasantry it enkindles a sort of pathological loyalty - the great virtue of melodrama, and in the bourgeoisie a desire to become like them.

In all the plays the theme of the indissoluble link, the backstairs union, between the Ascendancy and its followers is established. Loyalty is imprinted at birth in their followers, like ducklings on their mother. The image is used of a dog following at its master's heel: 'Ay, as the ragged dog at your heels is faithful and true to you, so you have been to me, my dear, devoted, loving playfellow - my wild companion.'³⁶ It is at one level an Ascendancy fantasy, a necessary fiction articulating their importance and their emotional ties to the people. They cannot realize that the ties are more economic and social than emotional, nor do they seem to latch on in any meaningful way to the fact that their followers are a good deal smarter and more capable of living in the world than they are, that their 'dogs' are the facilitator of their lives, not the followers at all.

Sometimes a reason is given, like Danny Mann's accident in *The Colleen Bawn* with its oddly reversed result: instead of breaking the bond, it strengthened and made it obsessive, like a broken leg set stronger than before, but crooked. Sometimes, as in Michael Dwyer's following of Emmet, it is just the natural order. 'Sure I'm only a dog at your heel, to watch for your bidding, and do it without axin' why,'³⁷ Shaun the Post

³⁵ M.J. Molloy, *The Wood of the Whispering*, (Dublin: Progress House Publications, 1961), p 34

³⁶ *The Shaughraun*, II. 3. p. 295.

³⁷ *Robert Emmet*, III. 2. p. 370.

cries of MacCoul: 'me that would go from the devil to Upper Canada to plaze the smallest hair of his head.'³⁸ There is a pattern in the plays that this loyalty is imprinted when they were children together - The Shaughraun and Ffolliott, Cregan and Danny Mann - and Arrah Meelish invokes the custom of fosterage as its root:

You were fostered under the old thatch itself, and if they took me and hung me to the dure-post beyant, sure my life 'ud be the only rint we ever paid the MacCoul for all the blessins we owe the ould family³⁹

But the peasants stay at that carefree, childish level while the gentry have solidified into manhood. Conn the Shaughraun, Myles na Coppaleen, Shaun the Post, Michael Dwyer, all retain the freshness of an immediate, spontaneous response to their world, the delight in living, singing, drinking and the pleasures of this life. In a further development of the duality so apparent in Irish plays of the eighteenth century, Boucicault intends to invoke the idea of the divided self, a notion that fascinated him. The Victorian age, its theatre and literature, is obsessed with the mysteries of the mind. In the theatre these issues were addressed in the form of extravagant coincidence, telepathy, clairvoyance, ghosts and hauntings.⁴⁰ The idea of the *doppelgänger* is a recurring one at the period, used by Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Robert Louis Stevenson, and even Oscar Wilde, to explore the split personality, often at war with itself. Boucicault first used it in *The Corsican Brothers*, where the twins share the same consciousness, like psychic Siamese twins, one single personality and mind, two characters played by the same actor. But he has

³⁸ *Arrah-na-Pogue* II. 3. p. 146

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I. 2. p. 121.

⁴⁰ On 11th of October, 1864, Ira and William Davenport, two American 'mediums' held the first séance of their sensational British tour in Boucicault's house, 326 Regent St. London. The audience included high-ranking members of the armed forces, the government and the church; the stunts included musical instruments playing by themselves, detached hands flying around and caressing the attendance, lights moving of their own volition, and ghostly voices. It was one of the first manifestations of the cult of spiritualism that later swept the country. *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 18/09/2005, p. 3.

refined and honed it for the purposes of his Irish plays, and uses it quite subtly. Progressing from *The Corsican Brothers*, he uses the idea of contrasting two sides of the same character in two separate but complementary characters on the stage. Danny Mann is the dark twisted side of Hardress Cregan, Conn the Shaughraun is the roguish tricky side of Ffolliott, Shaun the Post is the 'free' aspect of O'Grady. The gentry have acquired the starched nobility; their *alter egos* have retained the freedom, ease, and irresponsibility of their youth. The gentry have been moulded by the expectations of their society and education to their societal norm, while the peasants have been spared from acquiring the hard shell of respectability. Hardress Cregan is the only one who retains anything of his boyhood spontaneity, and this is not a fortunate survival. He fired Danny Mann off a cliff in a fit of temper when he was young and there is a twist in him still, though it is kept in check by the demands of 'honour'. The men the gentry have become are less than adequate; they are half-men and half-automatons created by their environment and training. Each of them has had erected around him a scaffolding of values that holds him in place, and which usually negate the urgings of good sense and personal feeling. Ffolliott is a gullible, noble fool; Cregan is a cowardly philanderer, Emmet a masterly incompetent, and O'Grady a prisoner of his position in society.

Boucicault explores the possibilities of supernatural links and psychological affinities. In *The Colleen Bawn*, Danny Mann functions as the buried twisted side of Cregan, prone to violence and the indulgence of his whims, a type of Nietzschean *untermensch*, or an incarnation of Cregan's violent id. He is Cregan's twisted, crippled, inner self, a projection of the unacceptable and unacknowledged nether self of the Victorian

gentleman, much as Algernon and Jack in *The Importance of Being Earnest* suggest his scandalous and unmentionable social life.

Kyrle Daly alerts us to the duality of Mann/Cregan at the start of *The Colleen Bawn* when he says: 'That fellow is like your shadow,'⁴¹ and Danny Mann plays with the fact that the shadow is crippled and the man himself an 'illigant gentleman.'⁴² The point is emphasised that the 'illigant gentleman' and his crippled shadow are bound together by a chain of guilt, pain, and deformity:

And he never *shall* leave me. Ten years ago he was a fine boy – we were foster-brothers and playmates – in a moment of passion, while we were struggling, I flung him from me from the gap rock into the reeks below, and thus he was maimed for life.⁴³

Danny's fall was physical, but Cregan's was metaphysical. He is capable of extreme violence, but also of repenting the violence he has done, lamenting over Danny like a mother over a lost child – 'if ye'd seen him nursin' me for months, and cryin' over me, and keenin,'⁴⁴ – which prefigures the line of action in the play.

Cregan's dark side is made manifest on the stage in Act two, Scene 1, by way of a soliloquy for two voices. We are given a dialogue between Cregan and his worse self, Danny Mann, and for that time there are two voices speaking as one, spiralling round the central problem. Cregan wants his wife removed, but is not prepared to think the thought, speak the words, or do the necessary deed, but he knows what has to be done.

⁴¹ *The Colleen Bawn*, I. 1. p. 193.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

Danny matches his thinking to Cregan's and articulates the inexpressible for him, but the honourable part of Cregan is appalled and forbids it. A perfected gentleman would not even recognize the possibility, but Cregan does, and acknowledges that he himself in his obvious and overt desperation has planted the idea in Danny's mind.

HARDRESS Oh! What a giddy fool I've been. What would I give to recall this fatal act which bars my fortune? [...] I was a fool when I refused to listen to you at the chapel of Castle Island. [...] I was mad to marry her.

DANNY I knew she was no wife for you. a poor thing widout manners or money or book larnin'. [...]

HARDRESS Well, it's done, and can't be undone...

DANNY Wouldn't she untie the knot herself – couldn't ye coax her? [...] Is that her love for you? You that gave up the devil an' all for her. What's her ruin to yours? [...] Don't I pluck a shamrock and wear it a day for the glory of St. Patrick, and then throw it away when it's gone by my likin' [...]

HARDRESS [...] She would have yielded ,but –

DANNY Pay her passage out to Quaybec, and put her aboard a three-master widout sayin' a word. [...]

HARDRESS If she still possesses that certificate – the proof of my first marriage – how can I wed another? Commit bigamy? – disgrace my wife – bastardize my children!

DANNY I'd do by Eily as with the glove there on yer hand; make it come off, as it come on – an' if it fits too tight, take the knife to it.

HARDRESS [...] Monster! Am I so vile that you dare to whisper such a thought.⁴⁵

Mann commits the murder, as he thinks, and gets afflicted by guilt, as by a Greek Fury, but Cregan cannot escape either. He suffers the remorse of the thought, while Mann suffers the guilt of the deed. 'It isn't in your body where the hurt is; the wound is in your poor sowl – there's all the harrum,' says his mother.⁴⁶ While Cregan cries, evoking the Fury again: 'My love for her, wild and maddened, has come back upon my heart like a vengeance.'⁴⁷ This play was written in 1860, thirty two years before Freud published his first work, and stands as an excellent instance, if one was needed, of how art anticipates

⁴⁵ *The Colleen Bawn*, II. 1. p. 213.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 1. p. 234.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, III. 5. p. 245.

science in mapping the human psyche, and how a dramatist can express the deeper realities of human thought and experience, not through scientific measurement, but through observation, instinct and intuition.

This idea of balancing a character with its counterpart, or splitting the character in two, can be seen at work, in a more subdued way, in the other plays. In *Arrah-na-Pogue*, Shaun the Post is not the other side of Beamish MacCoul but of the O'Grady. O'Grady sees in the innate nobility with which Shaun defends and protects the woman he loves, and in his easy-going contempt for the law which O'Grady feels himself but can never express openly, the sort of person he would like to be but can never now become.

O'Grady is the most benevolent of Boucicault's Ascendancy creations. He means well and is limitedly effective. He identifies with his people but cannot save them from the authorities, of which he is a pillar, but having a foot in both camps proves ultimately useful. The day is saved, not by the cunning of the rogue, Shaun the Post, but by the good offices of his alter ego, the O'Grady, acting in tandem with other benevolent authorities. O'Grady is sympathetic but he is ultimately a figure of fun, shown as a man trapped in the web that is spun by his position, which will not allow him to act according to what he sees is right, but whose strings are pulled by the controlling authorities. 'I'll fight him for it, if you like; but when you ask me to take legal means of righting myself, you forget I am an Irish gentleman, and not a process-server,' he says.⁴⁸ A strange statement coming from someone whose position it is to uphold and apply the law.

⁴⁸ *Arrah-na-Pogue*. III. 1. p. 161.

Concerns about the law and its value run all through Boucicault's Irish plays. As well as treating of the law of property and the title to land, it runs at a metaphoric level as well.

The O'Grady indignantly refuses to go to law to get Fanny Power: 'You would make me serve a writ of ejectment on my rival, that I may enjoy his property in this lady.'⁴⁹ In *Arrah-na-Pogue* the law is brought into disrepute by having an agent like Feeney, whom any decent man will kick from his door,⁵⁰ and the entire court scene is designed to show the law as an ass. The law always gets it wrong, and it has to be put right in out-lawish fashion. The biggest insult in this play is to call someone a process-server – one who pushes the law down people's throats, usually, at the time of the play's popularity, an eviction notice.

The law is always seen as oppressive, an alien concept lashed to the back of an uncomprehending society; the court scene points up what complete nonsense it is, how irrelevant and incomprehensible to the people on the receiving end. In all Boucicault's Irish plays, the law is a malign force, and justice is done and right vindicated by circumventing it in some manner. It follows then that the appliers and upholders of this law are oppressors, but these appliers are the very gentry who are the heroes of the plays, who cannot be shown in such an unsympathetic light. The O'Grady is shown to be one of them but is rescued by not being of their opinion. In order to put a layer of insulation between them and the people, Boucicault puts in an agent. In this case, it is Feeney, the process-server, who slyly reminds O'Grady who and what he is and who is responsible for his existence – members of O'Grady's own class: 'I'm only a tool, sir, in

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, III. 1. p. 161.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I. 3. p. 128.

my employer's hands, and sixteen shillins a week is all I get for my dirty work.' ⁵¹

Likewise in the other plays the faceless authorities are not given their real faces but the faces of middlemen, the mercantile ambitious middle classes, who are prepared to get dirty in pursuit of gain, and not those of the gentry who wish to retain their pristine honour, but reap the profits in silence.

One of the more unappealing traits of Hardress Cregan is his assumption that the law does not apply to him. He does his best to get the marriage licence from Eily by prating of her being 'content with the shelter of my heart,' ⁵² and is only stopped from bigamy by Myles na Copalleen, who tweaks him with the truth, and suffers Cregan's fury and guilty conscience: 'Vagabond! Outcast! Jailbird! Dare you prate of honour to me!' ⁵³

The point is repeatedly made that the law is not meant for the gentry. In *The Colleen Bawn*, Hardress Cregan is not alone in showing that the gentry consider themselves above the law. They treat Corrigan, the magistrate, with contempt and throw him into the horsepond for daring to suspect a gentleman, although the audience has been made well aware that the same gentleman is perfectly capable of crime, from murder to bigamy.

The Ascendancy women in the plays are not so confined by the armour of 'honour' and consequently, they are more malleable, more inclined to bend the constraints they find placed on them. In the matter of the law, especially, or of telling the truth, they do not scruple to twist it to their ends. They are more prepared to make things happen than the

⁵¹ *Arrah-na-Pogue*, I. 3. p. 130.

⁵² *Ibid.*, I. 3. p. 210.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I. 3. p. 211.

men, who spend their time reacting to events. Mrs. Cregan, in *The Colleen Bawn*, is a woman who is prepared to do anything to save her estates and her son:

ANNE He is not guilty.

MRS. CREGAN What's that to me woman? I am his mother – the hunters are after my blood.⁵⁴

The other women of the upper class are also ready to defend what they hold dear without being too scrupulous, in marked contrast to the peasant women who are more inclined to wring their hands and lament. Sarah Curran disperses the mob from Emmet's house by being decidedly economical with the truth: 'My father, John Philpot Curran, is here; he came in that carriage to see me; he will return home in it.'⁵⁵ She doesn't exactly tell a lie but she omits the crucial fact of the case, that Lord Norbury, whom the crowd is looking for, came with her father and is in the house at the time.

Anne Chute in *The Colleen Bawn*, and Claire Ffolliott in *The Shaughraun*, are examples of the high-spirited Irish gentrywoman that Boucicault and his audience obviously liked a lot. They are more complex characters than the leading peasant women, who tend to droop, but these other women are movers. They push the plot along by their own skills, brains and wiles; they are the successors to the resourceful Restoration heroines, who do not just sit around and wait for things to turn out all right, or for the men to come and save them. Anne Chute is the one who stands up to Corrigan and his policemen and bedamned to the consequences:

Gentlemen, come on, there was a time in Ireland when neither king nor faction could call on Castle Chute without a bloody welcome.

⁵⁴ *The Colleen Bawn*, III. 5. p. 246.

⁵⁵ *Robert Emmet*, II. 5. p. 363.

[...] His life's in danger, and if I can't love him, I'll fight for him, and that's more than any of you men can do.⁵⁶

She has Mrs. Cregan's spirit, without her hauteur or ruthlessness, and her red hair, her feistiness, her skill as a horsewoman, and her tendency to revert to brogue when excited, all mark her down as an excellent example of the stage Anglo-Irish Ascendancy female.

Even Fanny Power of Cabinteely, a dry, timid stick in the early part of *Arrah-na-Pogue* decides to control her own destiny and posts to Dublin to confess to the authorities she has been in treasonable correspondence with a convicted felon, in order to prevent a dreadful miscarriage of justice.

This is a type of spirited, independent woman which Boucicault first created in *London Assurance* in 1841. For that play he created two of them: Lady Gay Spanker, who is a hard-riding country lady, mad for fox-hunting, and Grace Harkaway, a clever young country miss who conceals her worldliness under a cloak of whimsy and what Parkin calls a 'streak of poetic blarney'.⁵⁷ Both of these women have the male characters jumping through hoops during the course of the play. Though neither is ostensibly Irish, the history of the play indicates strongly that they were conceived as Irish characters originally. In an extant early version of the play, called *Out of Town*, one of the characters, Dazzle, is an Irish adventurer. In the 1970 revival at the RSC, Ronald Eyre, the director, tells us that the cast experimented for a time in making all of the characters and the setting Irish:

⁵⁶ *The Colleen Bawn*, III. 5. p. 246.

⁵⁷ Parkin, p. 14

Oak Hall certainly made new sense as a place in which a lawyer could be mistaken for a gardener, a neighbouring landowner could be overlooked standing abstracted on a staircase, a squire could suddenly decide to have a ball.⁵⁸

Ray MacAnally, in his production of the play for the Irish National Theatre a year later, went the whole way and set the play in Ireland, with a full Irish cast, and the play fitted perfectly into the mainstream of Irish playwrighting, not least because it looks back to the plays of Sheridan, Goldsmith and Farquhar and the characters draw heavily on that tradition, but also reaches forward, as a clear inspiration to Oscar Wilde for *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It has the out-of-town setting, the town imposing on the country, the shrewd, imaginative young lady sequestered in her guardian's house, who instructs her disguised suitor how to woo her, but above all, it has a hound in a hamper, rather than a baby in a handbag.

Claire Ffolliott is the best example of the high-spirited Ascendancy female. She enjoys baiting Captain Molineux and firing his beefy English prejudices back at him, deliberately mispronouncing his name, and explaining to him the political meaning of the picturesque landscape. She has the flexibility that Boucicault allows his female characters, and she succeeds in sinking her honour in necessity long enough to draw Molineux off the scent of her brother, even though 'the blood [...] revolts in my heart against what I am doing.'⁵⁹ She looks on it as playing a part, which she was also doing at the start of the play, a recurring activity of the Ascendancy in plays. She is willing to fight for what she wants, and has a poor opinion of the value of the men around her:

⁵⁸ Ronald Eyre, ed., intro. to *London Assurance* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. xvii.

⁵⁹ *The Shaughraun*, II. 7. p. 306.

‘Oh, I wish I was a man. I wouldn’t give him up without a fight.’⁶⁰ Most startling of all, though never openly alluded to, is the fact that she is perfectly prepared to break the law, and appears to have persuaded Molineux to participate in the crime. Somebody lights the beacon on the head to summon the boat for Ffolliott, and the only people there at the time were Claire and Molineux. The only other possible explanation is that the landscape decided to take a hand in the plot and lit the beacon itself.

To the women, and to the peasants, the law is, like the men, something of an ass, to be ignored or circumvented where necessary, to be bent into a shape more accommodating to their personal needs. To them, the personal is always more important than the political. It is at its most obvious in *Robert Emmet*. ‘You have no fortune but my love,’ says Sarah Curran. ‘You cannot be bankrupt there; you have no home but my heart; no country but my arms.’⁶¹ Emmet differs: ‘He who undertakes the business of a people should have none of his own.’⁶² But after things go badly wrong for his rebellion, he abandons the idea of the political and embraces the personal: ‘I have slighted your love for a wanton infatuation! My other love has betrayed and deserted me; I come to you for forgiveness, for comfort and for peace.’⁶³

The political content of the plays is muted and generalized; Boucicault’s three best-known Irish plays do not focus directly on contemporary politics. At the beginning of *The Shaughraun*, Claire Ffolliott invokes the Wrongs of Ireland to discomfit Molineux, but it is more of a picturesque backdrop than a felt present oppression – that comes from

⁶⁰ *The Shaughraun*, I. 4. p. 279.

⁶¹ *Robert Emmet*, I. 1. p. 336.

⁶² *Ibid.*, I. 2. p. 341.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, III. 4. p. 376.

the economic war being waged on them by Kinchela. The movement in all the plays is towards reconciliation.

For all of his singing of “The Wearing of the Green” and getting it banned from the play, Boucicault does not, at this stage, advocate any radical action to break the link with England. The political content is carefully non-specific, not to offend the English, while catching the Americans; there is much talk of ‘my country’, ‘honour’, ‘independence’ and ‘freedom’⁶⁴ but it is abstract and non-directed. There is no doubting Boucicault’s national feeling but it is not nationalistic, not anti English, nor is it anti-crown – Emmet is sensible of the King’s graciousness in granting him clemency, but regretfully cannot accept it.⁶⁵

It is surprising to find at the centre of these plays, like a lot of later Irish drama, the question of land and its ownership. The difference here is that land is shown as an aristocratic concern; it was the basis of their existence, wealth, domination and survival, and the plays of Boucicault show that foundation being threatened from below by a rising bourgeoisie, who show every sign of taking the land away from them, or will only allow them to keep it if they swallow their pride and accept the upstarts into their society by marrying them.

This lies at the base of the conflict between Corrigan and the Cregans in *The Colleen Bawn*. The Cregans are filled with pride, hypocrisy and self-blindness. They have ‘the proud blood of the Cregans,’⁶⁶ and are united in their detestation of Corrigan. To Mrs

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, IV. 2. p. 387.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, IV. 2. p. 387.

⁶⁶ *The Colleen Bawn*, I. 1. p.195.

Cregan he is 'what the people here call a middle-man – vulgarly polite, and impudently obsequious.'⁶⁷ To Hardress, he is 'Genus squireen – a half-sir, and a whole scoundrel' and even to Anne Chute, he is 'a potato on a silver plate'.⁶⁸ All these attitudes are not dissimilar to those of Lady Gregory, Yeats, and Synge in their detestation of the rising middle-class - 'an ungodly ruck of fat-faced, sweaty-headed swine'.⁶⁹ They are condemning Corrigan for his tendency to rise in the world, at their expense, and to inhabit the same space and breathe the same air as they do. Their surface attractiveness puts us on their side, and Corrigan's villainous scheming is deeply offensive. The assembled Ascendancy end up throwing him symbolically in the horsepond for daring to question them, and the audience is meant to approve. Yet the relative attractiveness of the characters blind us as to who is right on this occasion; Corrigan was only, as a magistrate, trying to bring a murderer to justice, and that should have been approved of by the assembled gentry. The fact that Cregan is a gentleman is enough to acquit him in the eyes of the rest of the gentry; he does not even have to deny it.⁷⁰ Yet Cregan had been living a lie for years in being married to Eily, and he was perfectly capable of going through with a bigamous marriage. Why should he stop at murder? In fact, as an Irish audience would be well aware, in the crime that lies at the base of the play, John Scanlan, a Gentleman of Limerick, *did* murder his mistress in order to marry a rich heiress, and was hanged for it, along with his boatman, in spite of being defended by Daniel O'Connell. The case was a *cause célèbre* in 1820, only forty years before *The Colleen Bawn* was written, and had been kept alive in the public imagination by Gerald Griffin's novel, *The Collegians*, and a couple of previous stage adaptations. The judge

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I. I. p. 195.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, I. I. p. 195.

⁶⁹ J.M. Synge, letter to Stephen MacKenna in Ann Saddlemyer, 'The Mature Yeats', in *Irish Renaissance*, eds. Robin Skelton & David R. Clark (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1965), p. 74.

⁷⁰ *The Colleen Bawn*, III. 5. p. 248.

who tried the case ordered that Scanlan be executed immediately before his family could intervene:

The following August he was tried at the assizes; and, being found guilty, Baron Smith, to his immortal honour, ordered him for almost instant execution, lest the powerful interest of his family should procure him a respite, if he left him the period usually allowed to criminals convicted of a murder. The time allotted Scanlan to live was too short to admit a messenger going to Dublin and back again, and consequently he was executed, to the satisfaction of all lovers of justice.⁷¹

The above entry from the Newgate Calendar adds a different dimension to the mad dash to Dublin to procure the pardon of Shaun the Post in *Arrah-na-Pogue*. That shows a dash to save an innocent, but it was usually done to spare the influential guilty. The judge's fears show how likely, and common, such a procedure was: distressed parents pleading for their profligate sons to others of their own class – a separate law for the gentry.

The mother, Mrs. Cregan is shown to be quite capable of kidnap at least, and possibly murder,⁷² in order to preserve the estate which has been encumbered by her husband's extravagance. She has the Ascendancy pride and ruthlessness in abundance, and that's what Corrigan lusts after, 'Proud as Lady Beelzebub, and as grand as a queen' he gloats.⁷³ She is perfectly prepared to sacrifice her son to a loveless marriage to save the estate but neither she nor Hardress will tolerate an arranged marriage with Corrigan; that would be a class betrayal.

⁷¹ G.T. Crook, 'John Scanlan and Stephen Sullivan, The murderers of the Colleen Bawn,' in *The Complete Newgate Calendar*, Tarlton Law Library, Law in Popular Culture (London: Navarre Society Ltd, 1926) <www.tarlton.law.utexas.edu> [accessed 8/10/2002] (p. 3 of 3).

⁷² *The Colleen Bawn*, II. 2. p. 220.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 196.

If marriage is proposed by Corrigan, then there must be no religious obstacle. This is a Utopian scenario, and is created as a dramatic fiction, which could hardly obtain in fact; there would be great religious obstacles and racial as well as class difficulties. Lennox Robinson faced up to this in *Killycregs in Twilight*; Boucicault does not. Corrigan feels the fatal attractiveness of the Ascendancy: he does not want to get rid of them, he does not want to reform them; he wants to join them. But unlike most of those who come into contact with the gentry, he sees himself in a position to do so. Their contempt and outrage does nothing to diminish his ardour: 'Insolent wretch! My son shall answer and chastise you.'⁷⁴ 'Contemptible hound, I loath and despise you!,'⁷⁵ she cries, and Hardress spouts: 'I'll tear that dog's tongue from his throat that dared insult you with the offer.'⁷⁶ But no matter how they kick him Corrigan clings to his dream of becoming one of them. This doesn't blind him at all to the dual standards they apply, and the mention of the Colleen Bawn allows him to point out the hypocrisy of Mrs. Cregan's position:

MRS CREGAN And you would buy my aversion and disgust!
 CORRIGAN Just as Anne Chute buys your son, if she knew but all.
 Can he love his girl beyant, widout haten this heiress he's obliged to
 swallow?⁷⁷

Hardress' outburst about Corrigan only points up all the more the irony of himself having married down to the Colleen Bawn. He defends himself on the grounds of love

MRS. CREGAN A peasant girl – a vulgar barefooted beggar
 HARDRESS Whatever she is, love has made her my equal, and when you
 set your foot upon her you tread upon my heart.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 197.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 197.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 198.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 1. p. 197.

⁷⁸ *The Colleen Bawn*, I. 1. p. 56

But Corrigan's protestations of love for Mrs. Cregan could be just as heartfelt. His problems are that he is a comic character, as well as the economic aggressor.

Mrs. Cregan is a virago but also a pragmatist. Her objectives are the preservation of the estate and the good name of the Cregans, and she is prepared herself to marry Corrigan as a last resort: 'I must accept this man only to give you and yours a shelter.'⁷⁹ In the play, the marriage dance is danced to the music of love, whereas in reality, the gentry were prepared to open their ranks to the *nouveaux riches* if they had enough money, decent manners and no obviously offensive relations. Corrigan's problem is that he lacks the second requirement. Love had little to do with it. The attitude that love will find a way is a mid-nineteenth century melodramatic convention, not a matrimonial reality.

Boucicault's Irish trilogy of plays are not melodramas, but they do have melodramatic elements and themes. One of the most striking melodramatic tropes is that of economic persecution: the villain has some economic hold over the heroine and uses it to make her yield to his desires. The villain is usually an unscrupulous member of the establishment, and the heroine an ethical proletarian, caught between necessity and honour. Boucicault reverses the pattern by making the oppressing villain a bourgeois capitalist persecuting an upper-class heroine, and skews it further by making him almost a clown. The threat, though cloaked in comedy, is none the less real.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, II. 2. p. 218.

Kinchela, in *The Shaughraun*, is a perfect Boucicault bourgeois villain – grasping, greedy, unscrupulous, eager to abuse his power and the law to gain his own ends. His ‘loyalty’ is exactly that as described by Shaw in *John Bull’s Other Island*: ‘There is no such thing as genuine loyalty in Ireland. [...] It is simply exploitation of English rule in the interests of property, power and promotion.’⁸⁰ Kinchela pursues his own selfish ends. ‘Robert Ffolliott pardoned, and afther all the throuble I took to get him convicted? And this is the way a loyal man is thrated! I am betrayed’⁸¹ He exploits the system at the liminal point where the power of the landed gentry is failing but no new power has arisen to take its place. It is a time of unrecognised revolution, and Kinchella is an unconscious revolutionary. In fact, he is the new power, the power of bourgeois capital, just as Corrigan is in *The Colleen Bawn*. They have the wealth already and are moving to consolidate their position by using it to squeeze more concessions out of the existing Ascendancy; they are putting them under economic siege.

These rising squireens of the bourgeoisie are infatuated by the Ascendancy; they dream of marrying into them, of forcing their way in if they have to, using their wealth and economic domination as a battering ram. Corrigan tries it in *The Colleen Bawn* when he attempts to buy Mrs. Cregan; Kinchella targets and tries to kidnap Arte O’Neil in *The Shaughraun*. The gentry’s response is always one of horrified outrage that these minions could even think of such a thing, and they kick them out of the house; yet it is obvious enough, from a class and commercial point of view, that it makes perfect sense: the union of new money with old prestige to produce a new ruling class. That the Ascendancy rejected the proposition was a large part of their isolation and downfall. It

⁸⁰ George Bernard Shaw: ‘Preface for Politicians,’ in *John Bull’s Other Island, and Major Barbara: also How He Lied to Her Husband* (London: Constable, 1930), p. xxiii.

⁸¹ *The Shaughraun*, III. 3. p. 321.

is also possible that Boucicault may be observing that the Irish gentry were not as flexible in their survival skills as their English counterparts. He is, in his way, delineating the shape of the middle-class revolution. He may not particularly like it, any more than the guests at the Cregan wedding - he came of Ascendancy stock himself, his father was a Huguenot, his mother was a Darley - but he can see it coming. The social attractiveness of the Ascendancy is no match for the commercial skill of the bourgeoisie. The Ascendancy lived, for the most part, bedazzled by their own importance, confident of their status as the rarefied, exalted, untouchable, worshipped heroes of their own performance. The antics and ambitions of clowns like Kinchella and Corrigan struck them as a source of outrage or amusement. They did not realize, any more than did Chekhov's aristocrats, that these upstarts were the future rulers of the world.

By the time Boucicault was writing these plays in the final third of the nineteenth century, the participation of the Ascendancy in the theatre had shrunk to almost nothing. We have come a long way from the late seventeenth century, when Roger Boyle, the Earl of Orrery, was initiating the Heroic movement in English, in plays and novels which admitted no characters except the aristocracy, and endowed them with behaviour and dialogue of impossible heroism and nobility. In comparison with that, Boucicault's Ascendancy figures have a decidedly democratic look to them. He has hibernicised them; there is not an Earl, a Lord or a Baronet to be seen, and their behaviour when they try for the Heroic is markedly unsuccessful: Reality always scuppers them. There are two other strata to be dealt with now that Orrery would not have allowed past the stage door: the crafty, lively peasants who rescue the aristocracy from their difficulties, and the scheming, ambitious middle-class who are set to undermine the gentry and take their

place. That the alliance of Ascendancy and peasants defeats the bourgeois villain in each play ensures a happy ending, but it can be only a temporary respite. The assistance of the lower orders is seen by the gentry as a natural and deserved loyalty and esteem, an affirmation of their own worth, but it can equally be taken that the threatened downfall of the Big House also threatens the stability of the peasant world, and action taken to shore it up also preserves the peasants' way of life. The backstairs bargain that sustained both of them is threatened by the victory of the bourgeoisie. It is always the middle-classes that overthrow the ruling class, the lower classes are enmeshed in a liaison with them, of just the sort that Maria Edgeworth celebrates in her novel, *The Absentee*.⁸²

The upturning final denouements of the plays do not ring as true as the body of the plot; the difficulties are a lot more convincing than the solutions. Melodrama presented the members of the audience with an idealized image of their own existence, but also portrayed the economics of their oppression in a straightforward and subversive way. Michael Booth says that the social life and the trials of the working class are presented realistically, but the outcome of their oppression is not.⁸³ Such abuses should lead to revolution, but the plots are resolved always in a happy outcome. The meek inherit the earth and the arrogant are brought low. Virtue triumphs over evil and adversity, and Fate often takes a hand.

While Boucicault shows the Ascendancy mostly as attractive characters, the plays cut away at the root of their society, showing it in imminent danger of collapse. He is sufficiently close to the English melodrama to show that the law that holds aristocratic

⁸² Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee, & Castle Rackrent* (Ware Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1994).

⁸³ Michael Booth, *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-1976), I, pp. 24-28.

society together and keeps the Gentry in possession of their privileges does so by cynically excusing them from its strictures while at the same time oppressing the lower classes. The peasants may be oppressed legally but are shown to be far more vibrant and full of life than their hide-bound masters.

One of the most surprising things about these plays is that they show the gentry, far from being secure in their holdings, as we might have expected in the mid-nineteenth century, under constant threat of dispossession, not by nationalist, but by economic revolution. They may succeed in narrowly avoiding disaster, rather than averting it, but as they are the architects of their own misfortune, they are certain to come under further threats. Only a fortunate conjunction of their women and peasants save them, but what will happen if the peasants turn against them? Boucicault's plays show peasant and gentry united in intention and action. Michael Davitt and the Land League were about to change all that.

Chapter IX

'Opening the Future':

The Politicisation of Irish Melodrama

Boucicault: *Robert Emmet*, *The O'Dowd*, *The Fireside Story of Ireland*;
Melodrama at the Queen's: J.W. Whitbread, P.J. Bourke, Edmund Falconer,
Hubert O'Grady.

Boucicault is, as it were, the Roman Forum of the Irish theatre: all roads lead to him; all roads lead away. The gentlemanly rakes of Sheridan, the country gentlemen of Shadwell, Philips' self-reliant patriots, O'Keeffe's gallery of bibulous priests, wily peasants and sprightly heroines, and Macklin's true-born Irishmen are all built into his work. In the later dramatic literature, some elements flow from him by emulation and some by rejection. Yeats and the Literary Theatre took their dissatisfaction with the current Boucicault interpretations and imitations as their starting point, dismissing it as 'buffoonery and easy sentiment.'¹ Others developed strands latent in Boucicault's work. His friend Oscar Wilde transposed the fondness for linguistic paradox into an aristocratic key; Bernard Shaw borrowed ideas and scenes; Synge was an admirer; O'Casey contrarily preferred Boucicault to Shakespeare; and the dramatists of the Queen's Theatre developed Boucicault's strand of sentimental patriotism into a unique form of nationalist melodrama.

To Boucicault, economics was the basis of theatre; he held the literary aspect to be peripheral. He wrote that the audience is the true author, calling forth both the playwright and his works:

There are three constituent factors in the drama: the author who writes, the actor who performs, and the public that receives. Of these three the public is the most important, for it calls into existence the other two as infallibly as demand creates supply. When our people shall demand the highest class of dramatic entertainment, a Shakespeare and a Garrick will appear. Until then, my dear friend, the world will rest contented with such poor things as you and me.²

¹ Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* (Garrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1972), p. 20.

² Dion Boucicault, 'The Decline of the Drama,' in *The North American Review* (Sept. 1877), 235-245, Cornell Making of America, Cornell University Library, <<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/gifcache/moa/nora/nora125/00261.TIF6.gif>> p. 10 of 10 [accessed 08/10/2002].

What he doesn't acknowledge is that, through the phenomenal popularity in Ireland of *The Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, and *The Shaughraun*, he himself did the opposite and, to a great extent, manufactured an audience and welded it into a coherent, recognizable entity. This audience for his plays demanded and got, as he forecast, a drama that satisfied it – the Nationalist Melodrama. Though it traversed the country, and indeed the world, its base was at the Queen's Theatre in Dublin, and its glory days were in the 1880s and 1890s when J.W. Whitbread was manager. Morash observes that the Queen's at that time had 'an audience with a collective identity carried over from play to play'.³ It also carried over from theatre to theatre. When a melodrama by Queen's stalwart P.J. Bourke, *For the Land She Loved*, premiered at the Abbey in 1915, the audience came with it from the Queen's. At the Abbey, the audience was supposed to sit quietly in the dark, but Holloway observed how different a crowd this was from the usual. They smoked in the auditorium, hissed the villain, cheered the heroes, joined in the songs, and refused to be cowed by the ushers: 'The audiences have been a strange lot who insist on smoking and tell the assistant to go to Hell! when informed that no smoking is allowed. They are a law unto themselves.'⁴

The dominance and popularity of Boucicault in Ireland led directly to the creation of a whole genre of plays in *hommage* to his work, but which used real figures from Irish history rather than the fictional characters Boucicault usually created. When Whitbread, O'Grady, Bourke, or Allen grew tired of reviving Boucicault, they took to writing their own plays, using his as a template. There were so many productions of Boucicault's Irish Trilogy that the plays became deformed. Richard Pine blames Whitbread for the degeneration:

³ Morash, p. 110.

⁴ Herr, p. 16.

Boucicault, together with the 'Stage Irishman' he had portrayed so faithfully, and melodrama as a genre, unfairly became objects of derision, symbols of vulgarity.⁵

'Unfairly,' he notes, because this was the viewpoint of the elitist theatre movement; melodrama continued to delight the vulgar with its immediacy and theatricality. Whitbread's productions are somewhat to blame for the genre's reputation, though. He broadened and coarsened the humour in Boucicault, accentuated the sentimentality and boosted the 'sensation' scenes; he then created his own plays in this coarser style. He took Irish historical figures, such as Wolfe Tone or Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and pressed them into the mould of melodrama where they solidified into romantic heroes, and remain set to the present day. Many of these plays deal with the rebellion of 1798, and their method of delivering the story and characters owes a great deal to popular ballads, in which the folk memory of the rebellion was preserved and encoded, and on which the playwrights drew for their plots. The first precursor of the genre, Samuel Lover's *Rory O'More* (1830), is based directly on the ballad of the same name, but the simplicity, clarity and partisanship of the ballad form inspires them all.

The success of the genre was phenomenal. Whitbread's company opened a play in the Queen's, then went on a tour of Ireland, Scotland, England, and sometimes America and Australia. So that, Morash says, 'by the end of a tour, some of Whitbread's productions would boast of more than two thousand performances'. This would mean, given the size of theatres, and a sixty percent attendance, that some of his plays had been attended by more than three million people.⁶ But even this fails to take into account the constant revivals over the following decades and all over the country by touring or amateur

⁵ Richard Pine, 'After Boucicault: Melodrama and the Modern Irish Stage,' in *Prompts: Bulletin of the Irish Theatre Archive*, 6 (September 1983), 39-50, (p. 39).

⁶ Morash, p. 110.

companies, so that by 1930, it is quite likely that almost everyone in the country had attended *Theobald Wolfe Tone*, for example, at least once, and possibly a lot more often.

The political tendency that seeded the later nationalist works is sporadic but persistent in Boucicault's Irish plays: in *The Colleen Bawn* the law is openly despised; in *Arrah-na-Pogue* ridicule is piled on English law and law-givers, and 'The Wearing of the Green' is dangerously truculent; in *The Shaughraun* patriotic sentiment surfaces openly. We may note that while *Arrah-na-Pogue* is set in the past, and *The Colleen Bawn* in the present, *The Shaughraun* is actually set in the future, incorporating a blanket pardon from the Queen for all Fenian prisoners, which had not been granted by 1874 when the play was first presented, nor by 1876 when it was first produced in London. 'This pardon is the *deus ex machina* of the drama', wrote Boucicault;⁷ it was not a historical fact, but a wished-for outcome, a dramatic proposal of alternative reality. Boucicault is in the line of those Irish playwrights, like Shadwell and Philips, who create a stage Ireland of inclusion and compromise, an alternative to the uncomfortable sundered actuality, in the hope that Life will follow Art, and the instability of the present can be moulded into a stable future by a benign vision. Boucicault's belief in this concept is shown by his open letter to Disraeli published in January 1876 during the first production of *The Shaughraun* in London. He invokes Aristophanes as a precedent for theatrical interference in the political process, and speaking as 'one who loves his country and his people,' calls on the Prime Minister to acknowledge the implicit support for pardoning the Fenian prisoners that has been demonstrated by the London audience for the play:

⁷'Open letter to the Prime Minister, Disraeli', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 January 1876, p. 3 ; cited in Sven Eric Molin and Robin Goodfellowe, 'Nationalism on the Dublin Stage,' in *Eire - Ireland*, 21 (Spring 1986), 135-138 (p. 136).

I call to witness two hundred thousand of the people of London who have been present at this representation during one hundred nights. [...] The question has been asked nightly one hundred times to two thousand people of all classes from the Prince and Princess of Wales to the humblest mechanic in this city, and there has been no dissentient voice upon it – no not one! ⁸

The letter was dismissed as a publicity stunt, and was publicly ignored by Disraeli, but the play needed no publicity, having already run for a hundred nights. There was an element of snobbery in the dismissal of a mere player as a political commentator; Disraeli's comment when Boucicault's name was mentioned in his presence a short while later was: 'Boucicault! Strange name: I think I've heard it before. Is it someone in the conjuring business?'⁹ Justin McCarthy, a close colleague of Parnell, was of the opinion that Boucicault was, at that time, actively considering standing for an Irish seat in Parliament,¹⁰ and *The Shaughraun* undoubtedly had the cachet of an Irish patriotic play. Chatterton, the manager of the Drury Lane and Adelphi theatres, tells of the closing night of the first London production, when Boucicault defied him by whipping up the Home Rulers in the audience; it was his custom to improvise in the character of Conn in front of curtain during scene changes:

At the end of the first act, there was a double call, and a laurel wreath with green ribbons was cast at Boucicault's feet. At the end of the second act he was called for again and again, and pelted with shamrocks.¹¹

Boucicault was already moving the melodrama towards its nationalist incarnation, but he had to move circumspectly, because the Lord Chamberlain left no theatrical space for the real state of Ireland to be considered. As Boucicault became more politically aware, he took to inserting his political content in disguise. Music and song was one way to

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁹ Richard Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1979), p. 197.

¹⁰ Townsend Walsh, *The Career of Dion Boucicault* (New York: The Dunlap Society, 1915), p. 189.

¹¹ Fawkes, p. 197.

smuggle politics past the censor, but in *Arrah-na-Pogue* he was too explicit in singing that they were 'hanging men and women for the wearing of the green', and was ordered to withdraw the song from the play. Sentimental patriotism, unattached to any revolutionary declaration, was another method of evasion, such as Beamish MacCoul's rhapsody of attachment to the native soil, which is essentially a veiled political declaration, a coded reference to the exiled Fenians and the Famine exodus, perfectly legible to anyone familiar with the events:

Oh my land! My own land! Bless every blade of grass upon your green cheeks!
The clouds that hang over ye are the sighs of your exiled children, and your face
is always wet with their tears.¹²

Claire Ffolliott's exposure of the political squalor of Suilabeg at the beginning of *The Shaughraun* also touches on the politics of revolt and land forfeiture, the deepest and longest grievance in Irish history, but in a blend of melodrama and comedy that takes the sting out of it.

In *The O'Dowd* (1873/1880) Boucicault manoeuvres closer to the open political statement on stage.

Boucicault mistakenly thought this was one of his best plays, and he kept tinkering with it in the hope of having it recognized as such. Its earliest incarnation predates *The Shaughraun* by a year, but the version titled *The O'Dowd* dates from the production of 1880.¹³ It has good scenes, contains some fine characterization, snappy dialogue and

¹² *Arrah-na-Pogue*, I. 1. in *The Dolmen Boucicault*, ed. by David Krause (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1964), p. 115.

¹³ Parkin, p. 405: First appeared as: John Oxenford & Dion Boucicault, *Daddy O'Dowd: or Turn About is Fair Play* in New York in 1873 – an adaptation of *Les Crochets du Pere Martin* by Eugene Cromon & Eugene Grange, produced in Paris in 1858 – French's Standard Drama (New York: Samuel French, 1875). Revised and retitled: *The O'Dowd; or, Life in Galway* (1880), French's Acting Edition of Plays (London: Samuel French, n.d.). Later revised and retitled again as *Suilamore; or, Life in Galway* and also as *The O'Dowd; or, The Golden Fetters*.

good parts for character actors, but it misses the fine balance of sentiment, pathos, comedy, romance and excitement that his best works contains, and the climax is created from a purely visual spectacle of a shipwreck that anticipates the arrival of film – almost without dialogue but with lots of sound, action and special effects. What is most noteworthy in the play is the sharpening of the politics: he manages to get political concerns on to the stage, and gets to keep them there by making them central to the plot. His analysis is economic; there is no sense of a separatist or republican agenda, rather a call for a stop to the hemorrhaging of Irish wealth and resources out of the country, for which, clearly but indirectly, he blames the landlords.¹⁴

In Act I, Romsey Leake, the cockney moneylender, engages Daddy O'Dowd in an exchange on Irish farmers that manages to criticise the failure by landlords to re-invest their rents, sideswipe at the draining away of productive resources, and support the Land League's campaign to create a country of peasant proprietors:

ROMSEY I know you Irish farmers are not to be judged by the coat on your backs. You make a poor show, for fear the landlord should raise the rent on you. Eh?

DADDY I'm my own landlord, sir. I wish every Irish farmer could say the same.

ROMSEY I thought you Irish were so poor.

DADDY So we are, God help us – poor as a milch cow, whose milk goes to market, and whose calves are took away.

ROMSEY But you are rich?

DADDY Because I was my own master, working wid all my heart for my own flesh and blood, so I never measured my labour by the hour, but by my hopes. What I saw before me was a life – and not a week's wages.¹⁵

The political element cannot be excluded from the stage as Act III actually features an election for an Irish seat in Parliament. The election is fought between young Mike

¹⁴ Standish O'Grady claimed that Irish landlords has spent £2 billion of their Irish revenue abroad, while the Childers report of 1886 concluded that Ireland had been overtaxed to the extent of £250 million.

¹⁵ Dion Boucicault, *The O'Dowd*, "as presented at the Adelphi Theatre, London, October 21st 1880" (French's Acting Edition, n.d.), I. p. 13; in *35 Plays of Dion Boucicault*, University of Kent at Canterbury Library, Popular Nineteenth Century Drama on Microfilm.

O'Dowd and Colonel Muldoon, who previously owned the seat as the landlords' representative, but whose electors have 'revolted,'¹⁶ and put up young O'Dowd as an anti-landlord candidate. What precisely he is standing *for* is carefully never mentioned, but the signs that support him proclaim: 'O'Dowd and Ourselves,' even though Sinn Féin wasn't officially founded until 1905.

Boucicault craftily uses music and stagecraft to circumvent the censor. Muldoon's landlord party enters with a band playing "*Croppies lie down*," while the 'revolting' O'Dowd side is played in with "*Garry Owen*".¹⁷ Colonel Muldoon is described as 'the castle hack,' and enters escorted by the police, Mike O'Dowd makes his entrance escorted by the fashionable ladies from London who have come to Galway to canvass for him.¹⁸

At the hustings, Colonel Muldoon appeals to the crowd by speaking of his landlord family, which provokes jeers and good-humoured taunting about his family's parasitic absenteeism. The debate turns on population control, a dominant concern of the ruling class. Colonel Muldoon lectures the population with Ascendancy conviction: 'The evil we have to contend with is your extravagant tendency to over-population. I say the country is unable to support us all.'¹⁹ To those in the know, this conjures up the horrors of the Famine and the forced emigration it caused, and also the programme of 'aided emigration' that the landlords used in order to clear the land, and to prevent the growth of the enfranchised, land-owning, rural bourgeoisie that the Land League was ruthlessly creating. Boucicault rejects this argument – he argued elsewhere that only the fecundity

¹⁶ *The O'Dowd*, I. p. 30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30. *Garryowen* was the anthem of the Irish regiments in the British army.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, III. 3. p. 31.

of the Irish saved them from extermination ²⁰ – and Mike O'Dowd responds to it on behalf of the people:

MIKE Fifty years ago, she supported over eight millions, now there are less than five – and where did they go? And where shall we all have to go? Why to America, where they were changed on their arrival on that shore to thrifty, hard-working invaluable citizens, the life-blood of American labour, a source of American wealth and prosperity. ²¹

He is answering the subtext of Muldoon's speech, which partakes of the eugenics theory that held currency throughout the nineteenth century, that the Irish are one of the inferior races, too lazy to support themselves by working. But Mike O'Dowd cannot openly articulate the opposite argument that the system of land tenure and cultivation in Ireland is such that it actively militates against work and punishes initiative with higher rents. He can only point out, as his father has already done, that once it becomes worthwhile for the Irish to work, they embrace it wholeheartedly. This point is also made by a whole genre of Irish-American melodramas from the mid-century, such as those by James Pilgrim that show Irish peasants thriving in their new conditions and environment in American cities.²²

Mike O'Dowd finishes with a poem that comments acidly on the virulent parasitism of the Ascendancy class, that would have slotted easily into O'Keeffe's *Le Grenadier*:

Unhappy land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where few grow rich and multitudes decay.'²³

But, ironically, Mike is as much a parasite on his father's fortune, and his profligacy in London catches up with him and causes the O'Dowds to be ousted from their house and

²⁰ Dion Boucicault, *The Fireside Story of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Sons, n.d.), p. 10.

²¹ *The O'Dowd*, III. 3. p. 32.

²² Stephen Watt, 'Late nineteenth-century Irish theatre – before the Abbey and beyond,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, ed. Shaun Richards (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), pp.18-32 (p. 23).

²³ *The O'Dowd*, III. 3. p. 33.

lands by Romsey Leake the English moneylender. This introduces the theme of eviction, dispossession, and mystical union with the land that also runs through *The Shaughraun*. Leake and his crony Chalker take possession of Suilamore, but the new owners are boycotted by the entire population, rejected by the estate itself, and trapped economically. When Leake speaks in the last act it is with the voice and lamentation of a nineteenth-century Irish landlord:

ROMSEY LEAKE Oh, if I could sell Suilamore and get out of the country, but there is a blight on the land. All I have is in the place – and there I am in a prison, with every man and woman in the country as my gaoler.²⁴

As in *The Shaughraun*, where the ancestral estate of the Ffolliotts, Suilabeg, behaves as a living organism and rejects any foreign bodies that attempt to take it over, Leake in *The O'Dowd* also acknowledges that the land of the O'Dowd's, Suilamore, has turned against the usurper:

ROMSEY You have your revenge; you sowed your curses on the land, and they have come up. The tenants have left their holdings; ruin and weeds are growing up and choking the lands and house of Suilamore; no one dares to buy the place and I dare not leave it.²⁵

This could be taken as a comment on the English occupation, or of the plight of the landlord class in the 1880s: they are not wanted, can't manage, but won't leave, and as a result the country is in a state of terminal decay.

The O'Dowd lasted for four weeks in London in 1880, but was taken off because audiences found its views on Irish politics unacceptable.²⁶ Normally Boucicault would bow to audience demands; he regarded them as his masters, and even changed the end of

²⁴ *Ibid.*, IV. p. 44.

²⁵ *The O'Dowd*, IV. 45.

²⁶ Fawkes, p. 219.

The Octoroon to save the heroine and appease the abolitionist English audience. But in this case he stood firm. He inserted the following advertisement in the papers:

Mr. Boucicault regrets to perceive that certain scenes in his new play, *The O'Dowd*, continue to provoke expressions of displeasure from a portion of the audience. He has no wish to offend anyone. He is informed of a general opinion that the censured scenes are ill-timed, and ought to be omitted or their language changed. If the public will kindly refer to the announcement with which the production of *The O'Dowd* was prefaced, it will be seen that the features objected to are essential to the design and intent of the work. It is, therefore, in no captious spirit the author declines to alter it; but rather than lose the favour of any of his audience he will amend his error by withdrawing the play altogether.²⁷

Nelson remarks on the discrepancy between the parlous state of Ireland around the middle of the nineteenth century and the sprightliness of her people as portrayed on the stage; the happy spirit and light-hearted characters suggested that reports of widespread suffering and starvation were grossly exaggerated.²⁸ English opinion was conditioned by the Irish characters in plays, and did not realize the actual state of the country, but had the conviction that it could not be so bad when the stage natives appeared so happy. Audiences were unaware of the censorship implemented by the Lord Chamberlain; they did not know of the cuts he had ordered in the texts themselves nor of the stultifying effects of his baleful eye on the writers. Any criticism of the ruling class or advocacy of social change was forbidden, but the reaction to *The O'Dowd* shows that something of Boucicault's political concerns was getting across, though not enough to satisfy him, because in the following year, 1881, he gave the nationalist melodrama another nudge along the road with his pamphlet, *The Fireside Story of Ireland*, whose influence he spread as widely as possible in at least three editions, in America, in England and in Ireland. The original was published in Boston in 1881. The publication for England had

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²⁸ Malcolm James Nelson, 'From Rory and Paddy to Boucicault's Myles, Shaun and Conn: The Irishman on the London Stage, 1830-1860,' in *Eire-Ireland* 13 (Fall 1978), 79-105 (p.105).

at least two editions: Fawkes has it selling for a penny to the audience after the September 1881 production of *The Colleen Bawn* in London, Manchester and Liverpool,²⁹ and a threepenny English edition is stored in the National Library of Ireland.³⁰ There is also an Irish edition by Gill and son, which has no publication date, but which internal evidence also dates to 1881. It is significant that Boucicault was distributing the pamphlet in Manchester and London, the scenes of the Fenian attacks that caused such outrage in England, and moved English draughtsmen to create the 'simian' Irish caricature so prevalent in the pages of *Punch*. Whether or not Boucicault was thinking of standing for Parliament at the time, he had been doing a lot of reading on Irish history, and cites a number of sources on the inside cover of the pamphlet, including Froude and Lecky.³¹ *The Fireside Story* is an angry and focussed attack on English misrule, greed and parasitism in Ireland. It concentrates on their economic vampirism, how the English ruling class had been sucking the wealth out of Ireland for centuries, by appropriating not just the land, resources and produce, but any office that might generate income. He lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of the English ruling classes, lay and clerical, while insisting that the English working class have reason to make common cause with their downtrodden Irish brethren, in this year when the Boer War erupted and Parnell was imprisoned.

'Let me tell you the story of Ireland,' he begins, like a *seanchie* in a chimney corner, or the Ancient Mariner taking you by the lapels,³² and then proceeds to give what is in effect the story of Ireland's economic rape by the English upper classes.

²⁹ Fawkes, p. 220.

³⁰ (London: Routledge, 1881?)

³¹ Dion Boucicault, *The Fireside History of Ireland*: 'The Journals of Parliament, Swifts' works, Macaulay's *England*; Burke on *The Popery Laws*; Scully on *The Penal Laws*; Froude's *English in Ireland*; Lecky's *Eighteenth Century*; O'Connor's *History of the Irish Catholics*; Plowden's *History of Ireland*; Carte's *Ormond*; Spenser's *State of Ireland*, and others.' (Dublin: Gill & Son, n.d.), n.p..

³² *Ibid.*, p.1.

Boucicault divides his story into four parts, four 'grabs,' four 'massacres' – four acts as Cheryl Herr says.³³ 'The last of these massacres occurred eighty-three years ago,'³⁴ he writes, referring to 1798, which gives us the date of the publication as 1881.

He draws heavily on Lecky and his sources in describing the attempted genocide of the Irish in the seventeenth century, calling up the image of the Garden so much invoked at the time by the colonists:

The policy of England was 'to root out the Irish.' from the soil and, after clearing it of the chieftains and the septs, as a wild country is cleared of trees and wild vegetation, to plant it with English tenants.³⁵

He casts the English as ruthless villains, wholesale murderers of men, women and children, and as economic villains whose intention is to grab the land, resources and any wealth that the country might create. He accuses the English aristocracy, from the Kings down. He gives to the Duchess of Munster, the King's mistress who was the instigator of the notorious Wood's ha'pence that enraged Swift, a theatrical character: 'The royal honour consisted of calling upon Ireland to pay for the extravagance of a prostitute, and what was worse on this occasion, it was an old and ugly one.'³⁶

The reaction in the English press to *The Fireside Story* was the same as that which greeted his letter to Disraeli. *The Illustrated London News* dismissed it as an advertising gimmick, 'which must be condemned by all who believe that even in advertising good taste should be displayed by educated men.'³⁷ They thought that it was bad form to introduce English atrocities into theatrical discourse, but were ready enough to applaud

³³ Herr, p. 48.

³⁴ *Fireside Story*, p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁷ Fawkes, p. 220.

portrayals of Spanish genocide in Sheridan's *Pizarro*, written in 1799, and still being produced to great success a century later, in which, in fact, Boucicault had made his acting debut as Rollo, the Noble Savage, while he was at school.

The Fireside Story does not call for political independence but for economic control by the Irish and proper management of the country's resources and wealth, a programme that reaches back to the writings of Molyneux, Swift and the Irish Volunteers of the eighteenth century. It may be a nationalist rant, but it is a very angry and apparently heartfelt one. In *The Fireside Story*, the general thrust of the historical melodrama is emerging: scheming English villains, and pallid Irish victims of English villainy. There is a much sharper historical bite than in *The Shaughraun*, for example, but the line of reconciliation is still the one Boucicault pursues, by appealing to the English people over the heads of their governing class, during a period of proletarian discontent. The pamphlet is directed at the working class, the patrons of the melodrama, and betrays an unusually socialist mentality. Molin and Goodfellowe remark that 'if one knew nothing of Boucicault's success on the English stage, he would read the pamphlet as the straight-out work of an Irish patriot.'³⁸ But there are two elements in the pamphlet that tie it to a melodramatist. The first is the casting of Ireland as a virtuous, friendless, lower-class female. For this he uses the Cinderella image:

The elder sisters of the British family seemed to regard her with indifference and contempt, as one fitted for a sordid life of servitude. Her story will show that she has been denied the education every other people has enjoyed; that she vainly besought to earn her own livelihood, but that was refused. Thus, like an untutored, neglected, ragged Cinderella, she has been confined in the out-house of Great Britain.³⁹

³⁸ Molin and Goodfellowe, p.135.

³⁹ *Fireside Story*, p. 2.

The second is that this colourless but impeccably virtuous female is under economic assault by the evil members of the ruling class. The English working class, Boucicault is saying, would sympathize with her if they knew the dramatic facts of the case; since it cannot be shown on the stage, the job of this pamphlet, distributed to the audience, is to acquaint them with those facts. Then they would see the connection between their own and Irish grievances.

This opposition to an evil and recalcitrant Governing Class and the call for radical solidarity puts Boucicault directly in a line with Knowles, with whom he was friendly as a young playwright in London, and of whom he speaks highly in his later writing.⁴⁰ As the Irish troubles caused fatalities in the streets of Manchester, and 'a fear was entertained that the working classes might sympathize, and ally themselves and their discontent with the Irish insurrectionary movement,'⁴¹ he finishes with an appeal to the better nature of the English people over the heads of their corrupt rulers:

But my task is not to comment: it is simply to record. I lay the story of Ireland before the English people, as an indictment against the Governing Class. I do it in the spirit of the statesman who thus compared the character of the people of England with the character of the class to which they had confided the administration of the country:

"Never was there any country in which there was so much absence of public principle, and so many instances of private worth. [...] Yet among their profusion of private virtue, there is in the Governing Class a total want of public spirit, and the most deplorable contempt of public principle."⁴²

In *The Fireside Story of Ireland* Boucicault is putting into the public domain what he was not allowed to say on the stage. Even at this date, the censor was cutting remarks

⁴⁰ Dion Boucicault, 'Early Days of a Dramatist,' in *North American Review*, 148 (May 1889), 584-593, Cornell Making of America, Cornell University Library, <<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/gifcache/moa/nora/nora148/00596.TIF6.gif>> [accessed 5/11/2005]

⁴¹ *Fireside Story*, p. 21.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

critical of landlords, the ruling class, or the government. The Lord Chamberlain's *Register of Plays* shows that as late as 1885 he was removing references to the evils of the landlord system, such as: "more like one of those wicked landlords escaped from Ireland"; "the wicked landlord system"; "...bloated toad of a landlord in parliament"; "Why after a time the property ought to belong to the tenant."⁴³

Boucicault's criticism of the political system pokes through in his earlier plays, but *The Fireside Story of Ireland*, with its melodramatic, villainous ruling class and wronged, working class Cinderella, is his attempt to bring the subtext to the surface for an American or an English audience, out of reach of the censor's knife.

But his analysis creates a problem dramatically. Melodrama needs a clear-cut villain, and in English melodrama these are often aristocrats, but Boucicault has already cast his Irish Ascendancy figures in the role of equivocal heroes. He availed himself instead of those readymade theatrical villains, the middlemen – the unlovely spectacle of the bourgeois *homo economicus* on the rise, what Maria Edgeworth describes as: 'the half-kind of gentleman, with a red silk handkerchief about his neck and a silver-handled whip in his hand,'⁴⁴ who made excellent but vincible villains.

A patriotic melodrama also needs a hero, and Conn, Shaun and Myles are too slight to bear the weight of the emergent ideology – they cannot embody the articulate self-aware nationalism that was burgeoning in these plays. They can shout 'God save Ireland' and sing the patriotic songs that codify and spread the nationalist aspiration – what Malone calls 'politics in verse'⁴⁵ – but to carry credibly the full-blown eloquence of Irish

⁴³ Nelson, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee* (Ware Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1994), p. 175.

⁴⁵ Andrew E. Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London: Constable, 1929), p. 32.

aspirations needs an educated mouthpiece. Boucicault had in his creations of Beamish MacCoul and Robert Ffolliott endowed the Ascendancy men with an attractive foolishness, but in 1884 he broke new ground and created a new type of hero in Robert Emmet – a transgressing aristocrat, who is like Knowles' heroes in opposing the verities of his class in favour of revolutionary change, but, with Boucicaultish ambiguity, retains a foot in both camps. Such a hero is able to present Ireland's case in eloquent high rhetoric, without a trace of apology or brogue.

Robert Emmet is dramatically speaking a retrograde step: the political, social and economic concerns are subsumed into the personality and rhetoric of the hero, but Boucicault doesn't write good heroes – unlike Knowles, he has no real interest in such figures, and it shows. The play only comes to life with the villains, informers and lowlifes. The character of Robert Emmet was written for Henry Irving, though he never played the part, so he would presumably have fleshed it out, as nineteenth-century writers expected of their actors. But Boucicault had no very high opinion of Irving, considering him inadequate for the creation of characters that live long in the memory:

There is only one stern question and true test that can be applied to the dramatist or to the actor, if we would determine the quality of his talents: what characters has he left as heirlooms to the stage and to dramatic literature? He can materialize to the future in that way alone. [...] Let us try to remember what important characters have been the outcome of the careers of the recent dynasties of Kean and Irving. We fail to remember one! These artists have not left one legacy to the *repertoire* of the drama with which their names can be associate.⁴⁶

So that, while he is trying to make Emmet a character that will match the grandeur and nobility of the great creations of his friend and colleague James Sheridan Knowles – 'the greatest dramatic poet of our century,' as he described him – ⁴⁷ he has no belief

⁴⁶ 'Early Days of a Dramatist,' p. 586.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 589.

either in his own ability to create such a transcendent figure nor of Irving's ability to 'materialize' it.

Emmet is a Knowlesian figure, the outlaw idealist, fired with a messianic zeal that combines the religious and the revolutionary:

EMMET My friends – my countrymen! I go hence – to Dublin – alone, and in this uniform – the badge of treason; I carry with me that flag -- the emblem of rebellion; I go with my life to redeem yours; to offer my hands to the chains, my head to the executioner.⁴⁸

He is the heroic titan around whose feet the puny people swarm. In Emmet, Boucicault has created the archetype of the Irish nationalist hero, not just on the stage, but in popular apprehension. He is a moral, not a real figure, relentlessly virtuous, (though a bit obtuse), the type of moral protagonist that Knowles had made such use of, and who gives to his plays and to the Nationalist melodramas something of the flat feeling of medieval Morality Plays. In the decades that followed, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Wolfe Tone, Henry Joy McCracken, Fr. Murphy, Patrick Sarsfield and Michael Dwyer will all conform to the template Boucicault created in Robert Emmet.

The economic analysis and demands that have pervaded the Irish drama, though still evident in *Robert Emmet*, are of less importance than political concerns, strung together on a line that advertises 'freedom,' 'love of native land,' 'green flag,' 'helpless people whose one hope is freedom.' There is little mention of the specific Irish grievances that Boucicault had parleyed into his previous plays; the focus is on abstractions, not unlike Knowles, such as, country, freedom, honour and flag, the tradition of sacrifice. There is no concrete enemy; the Kafkaesque 'Castle' becomes a ubiquitous shadowy threat with

⁴⁸ *Robert Emmet*, II. 3. ed. by Parkin, p. 359.

its agents and informers. There is no fire in the belly of the play, but the figure of Emmet himself, though irritatingly foolish, proved seminal. He became, as the Irish Historical Hero – noble, eloquent, and sacrificial – the basis for the next generation of Irish plays, the Irish Nationalist Melodrama, a genre brought to fruition by J.W. Whitbread, playwright and manager of the Queen's Theatre towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Whitbread was an Englishman who took over the management of the Queen's Royal Theatre in 1884. With the burning of the Theatre Royal in 1880, the soubriquet and mantle of 'national theatre' fell to the Queen's. Its yearly programme consisted of various types of entertainment. Touring companies from England performed music-hall shows, successful London plays, grand and light opera, Shakespeare and other classics, showcasing visiting stars such as Irving, Ellen Terry or Charles Kean. American touring companies also performed, sometimes doing 'Western' plays with cowboys and Indians. But Whitbread also formed local companies to present, for about one-third of the theatrical year, pantomimes, topical burlesques and plays with an Irish interest; or he rented the theatre to Irish touring companies, such as Hubert O'Grady's or the Kennedy-Millar Combination. At the beginning of his reign, Whitbread staged revivals of popular Irish plays by Boucicault, Falconer, and Buckstone, and observing the reaction to the nationalist elements in Boucicault's plays, he recognized the commercial potential of theatrical Irish patriotism. Between 1886 and 1906 Whitbread wrote fourteen Irish plays for the Queen's that were also hugely popular in other theatres around Ireland and with the Irish Diaspora abroad – a reversal of Boucicault's route of bringing successful American productions home. These plays represent a culminating, but usually ignored, point in the forging of an Irish political consciousness through drama and literature, one that is based on an agreed interpretation of Irish history, particularly of 1798. They

employ a sort of theatrical shorthand: trusting to the audience's prior knowledge, the events portrayed are often only cursorily delineated. They push away from a bourgeois concern with economics towards abstract values such as honour, fidelity, or sacrifice, the sort of values that were percolating from ancient Irish myth and legend that also inspired the aristocratic exponents of the Literary Revival, in particular its founder Standish James O'Grady.

Whitbread wrote three successful plays on Irish historical themes before the looming centenary of 1798 inspired him to create a play around Lord Edward Fitzgerald. For his source material he mined the popular folklore and the newly-published exposé of the infiltration and betrayal that undermined the United Irishmen, W.J. Fitzpatrick's book, *Irish Secret Service under Pitt*.⁴⁹

The part of Lord Edward is a dramatic twin of Boucicault's Robert Emmet. He is a transgressing aristocrat, who, like Emmet or the heroes of Knowles' plays, is an idealist estranged from his own class, but never loses his aristocratic panache. Lecky comments caustically on the apparent need of Irish revolutionaries to have an aristocrat at the head of their movement:

The cooperation of a member of the first family of the Protestant aristocracy was of no small advantage to the conspiracy in a country where the genuine popular feeling, amid all its aberrations, has always shown itself curiously aristocratic, and where the first instinct of the people when embarking in democratic and revolutionary movements has usually been to find some one of good family and position to place at their head.⁵⁰

⁴⁹W.J. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Secret Service under Pitt* (London: Longman Green, 1892). Whitbread gives a credit to the book on the title page of *Lord Edward*: 'Based on *The Irish Secret Service under Pitt*, by W.J. Fitzpatrick'; Herr, p. 83.

⁵⁰ W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by L.P. Curtis, abridged to one vol. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 350.

His class and background blind Lecky to the fact that Irish nationalism, initially, was essentially tribal and aristocratic, in that it sought the lost world that disappeared with the Flight of the Earls, and that this aspiration, that had flowed underground for centuries, united peasant and aristocrat, while marginalizing the middle-class, who looked more to French egalitarianism and economic advantage. The logical people to lead this Arthurian crusade would be the successors of those original chieftains who had survived the holocaust of the seventeenth century. For instance, Standish James O'Grady tried to rouse the Duke of Ormond, descendant of the Butlers of Kilkenny, to stand at the head of the country,⁵¹ and looked at in this light, Lord Edward Fitzgerald is a perfect candidate for an Irish revolutionary leader.

Nationalism in the middle of the nineteenth century was in an unstable condition, as different views and priorities jostled for position in the developing national consciousness. That this struggle between strands within the overall movement is reflected in the literature is hardly surprising, as literature was the driving and codifying force for the movement.

The most intense struggle, sometimes genteel, sometimes vicious, was that between aristocratic and democratic nationalism. The one stemmed from the Patriots of the 1780s, the other from the rebellion of 1798, nursed back to life by the Young Irelanders, sent out into the world by the Fenians, and set to work by the Land League. The first was largely, but by no means exclusively, Protestant; the other was mostly, but not entirely, Catholic. One of the battlegrounds was the control of literature and scholarship. Yeats defines the characteristics of the two factions:

⁵¹ 'But his great passion was yachting and woodcock shooting and he didn't fancy the epic role O'Grady envisaged for him.' Mark Bence-Jones, *The Twilight of the Ascendancy* (London: Constable, 1987), p. 90.

A generation before *The Nation* newspaper was founded the Royal Irish Academy had begun the study of ancient Irish literature. That study was as much a gift from the Protestant aristocracy which had created the Parliament as *The Nation* and its school, though Davis and Mitchell were Protestants, was a gift from the Catholic middle classes who were to create the Irish Free State.⁵²

One focussed its appeal on the upper and lower classes, one on the middle; one valued the Irish language, the other dismissed it; one valued the aristocratic literature of the Red Branch, one the more democratic tales of the Fianna; one viewed the Ascendancy as the potential and natural saviours of the country, the other saw them as the enemy. Michael Davitt thought the Irish landlords did not deserve their fare to Holyhead, but Standish James O'Grady thought them 'still the best class we have and so far better than the rest that there is none fit to mention as next best'.⁵³

The aristocratic paternalism that Lecky notes and which Whitbread's *Lord Edward Fitzgerald* instances was one of the important strands in the debate. Maria Edgeworth's novels, *The Absentee* and *Ennui*, enact a paradigm in which the Ascendancy, returning to their neglected estates, receive an emotional and tumultuous welcome, but this is fantasy and special pleading. The reality was that the Ascendancy had made themselves irrelevant by their continued absence, or, if present, detested for their mismanagement. They siphoned off the rents from their estates, but returned, in most cases, nothing by way of investment. Standish James O'Grady, an enthusiastic but eccentric advocate of aristocratic rule, in his great philippic, *Toryism and Tory Democracy*, berates them for their horrendous waste of the country's wealth:

You have spent the rents of all Ireland [...] You have spent, in rent and taxes, I should say at least some two thousand millions of pounds, and you have spent

⁵² WB Yeats, 'A General Introduction for my Work,' in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp.509-527 (p. 511).

⁵³ Standish James O'Grady, *Selected Essays and Passages*, ed. by Ernest A. Boyd, Every Irishman's Library (Dublin: Talbot Press, n. d.), p. 203.

that vast sum upon anything rather than in the making of friends. You are few and friendless, and let me add, hated. ⁵⁴

Both O'Grady and Edgeworth are trying in their own way to rouse the Ascendancy to save themselves, their order, and the country. Edgeworth does so by modelling best practice, and also by rehearsing the results of their present evil ways, especially in *Castle Rackrent*. O'Grady whips them with his scorn and contempt in the hope of stirring some members of the class to execute the duties that their position demands. For the Ascendancy as a whole he despairs; their long performance on the Irish stage is dwindling to a sad, slow curtain:

Your career is like some uncouth epic begun by a true poet, continued by a newspaper man, and ended by a buffoon; heroic verse, followed by prose, and closed in a disgusting farce. Then *plaudite* and *exeunt omnes*. The curtain falls on two centuries of Irish history, and such centuries. The paraphernalia are removed. A new act begins with new actors.⁵⁵

Whitbread's nationalistic melodramas enter this debate on the place and usefulness of the Ascendancy on the positive side, by adopting and developing the type of character that Boucicault created for Robert Emmet: the aristocrat as an articulate, eloquent spokesman for the oppressed people. But Whitbread's Lord Edward borrows also from Knowles, and is a transitional figure, in that he is an aristocrat that espouses revolutionary change in society, but also possesses the Victorian bourgeois virtues of uxoriousness, strong familial attachments and religious convictions. Whitbread thus bourgeoisises the aristocracy, while simultaneously using the aristocratic qualities of carelessness, recklessness, fearlessness, style and eloquence to dignify and elevate the arguments for revolution.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Dramatically speaking, Whitbread's *Lord Edward Fitzgerald; or, '98* (1894) is like an inferior play by Boucicault. Certain strands have been boosted; the emphasis is mainly on the servants, Thady and Katy, and on the string of villains – Turner, Magan, Higgins, and Sirr. Major Swan is the decent English officer, reluctantly doing his duty, like Molineux in *The Shaughraun*, while Lord Edward and his wife, Pamela, do little more than posture attractively. There is no individuality to the characters and no plot development at all; the play is a roller-coaster of near-escapes, hot pursuit, and final capture, yet it struck a nerve, and became one of the most popular plays in the repertoire, revered and set in stone by the audience's jealous familiarity. For a revival three years after its first presentation, *The Irish Times* wrote:

In the popular portions of the house it was impossible to get even standing room at the rise of the curtain, and the other sections were likewise filled. [...] The place which it holds among the latter-day contributions to the Irish drama is accurately attested by the large measure of patronage invariably extended to it.⁵⁶

Lord Edward is like Boucicault's Emmet or Ffolliott in that, raised as a gentleman, he has become a simpleton, easily imposed-on and foolishly trusting, a terrible judge of men and a bad leader. It is left to his crafty followers to extricate him, and create dramatic occasions on which to hang comic or villainous turns. The villains vary only in their degree of villainy, their success judged by the amount of vocal loathing they could raise in the audience. *Lord Edward* gives ample scope for competitive villainy between the actors; there are six of them, mostly representative of the middle-class *homo economicus*, who was always pilloried by Boucicault, then by the nationalist melodrama, then excoriated by Yeats and Synge, until Shaw went some distance to rehabilitate him in *John Bull's Other Island*.

⁵⁶ *The Irish Times*, 20 April 1897, cited by Herr, p. 8.

Holloway writes that there is not a trace of the stage Irishman in Whitbread's plays,⁵⁷ but he seems to be looking only at the heroic central character, because the other main character, Thady, in *Lord Edward* is a typical sub-shaughraun vagabond, although he has none of the wit and grace of the Shaughraun, the dignity of Shaun the Post, nor the resourcefulness of Myles na Copaleen. He is all roguish blarney and blather:

THADY Arrah, come here, (*he takes her in his arms*) an' don't let us be blatherin' nonsense any longer; ye're as swate as a new nut in Autumn, yez eyes sparkle like dewdrops defyin' the mornin' sun; an' ye breath is like a whiff ov air from off the top ov the Wicklow Mountains, it's so fresh and pure.⁵⁸

Everybody, including himself, speaks of Lord Edward as the sole *fons et origo* of the '98 rebellion, but his role in the play consists of greeting his wife affectionately, explaining matters and the progress of the conspiracy to her, and uttering heartfelt nationalist sentiments to rouse the audience, before escaping again. He actually makes less of a dramatic impact than either Ffolliott or Beamish MacCoul. The imbalance in the elements of the drama in *Lord Edward* – the over-emphasis on roguery in the clown/hero, and the superabundance of villains – serves to point up how well Boucicault keeps them in balance.

The play can be linked thematically to Knowles, in the abstract simplicity of its oppositions and the ethical clarity of its conflicts, but it was Boucicault who set the pattern with his eloquent aristocratic prototypes. Boucicault, however, had sufficient psychological insight and dramatic acumen to undercut the heroics, and even, in Emmet's case, to renounce the public revolutionary life in favour of the personal life when confronted with the tawdry actions of the people he was willing to die for. Emmet

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ J.W. Whitbread, *Lord Edward*, I. 1. in Herr, p. 95.

first embraces, but then eschews the sacrificial role. 'Let the penalty be mine alone; let no blood but mine be shed; Accept my young life in expiation of my foolish faith,' he declares to his followers.⁵⁹ But later he tells Sarah Curran: 'I have slighted your love for a wanton infatuation! My other love has betrayed and deserted me; I come to you for forgiveness, for comfort, and for peace.'⁶⁰

Whitbread's heroes, however, are firmly set in their conviction of the primacy of their public messianic mandate. Lord Edward, as he dies, sets the standard of sacrifice for Ireland: 'I have devoted myself wholly to her emancipation. Sacrificed wife, children, fortune, even life itself in her cause.'⁶¹ This play and its successors were instrumental in setting Irish nationalism on the path of blood sacrifice that led ultimately to Pearse and 1916. This eloquent high-minded sacrifice is to be found initially in Lord Edward's aristocratic mind-set, but that mind-set is passed down intact to Wolfe Tone, Napper Tandy, Michael Dwyer, and so on. All of Whitbread's heroes exhibit the same *générosité* regardless of actual class, which serves to preserve aristocratic sacrificial heroism at the centre of plays in which no aristocrat appears, but also to elevate bourgeois morality above its mercantile norms.

Whitbread's *Theobald Wolfe Tone* (1898) enacts a fusion of two moralities, in that, during the early scenes, it concentrates almost exclusively on the personal life of Wolfe Tone, with the politics bubbling along in the background and occasionally surfacing to remind the audience of the wider context. It moves then to assert the primacy of the wider context, to state that politics is superior to the private life, that the personal life must be subservient to politics and serve it, a sentiment repeated by Yeats' *Cathleen Ní*

⁵⁹ *Robert Emmet*, II. 3. p. 359.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* III. 4. p. 376.

⁶¹ *Lord Edward*, V. 1. p. 169.

Houlihan in 1902, and the direct opposite of what Boucicault asserts in *Robert Emmet*. By doing so, it moves the audience from recognizing the common humanity of Wolfe Tone to identification with his sacrificial revolutionary role, and with the wife who will sacrifice her husband for The Cause.

Theobald Wolfe Tone premiered on the 26th of December 1898 at the Queen's. Instead of a pantomime, traditional at that time of year, Whitbread chose to give the people the quintessential nationalist melodrama, and in the centenary year of 1798, their reaction was one of unbridled enthusiasm. It was a gala occasion for the people of Dublin with huge crowds trying to get into the theatre. Holloway tells us of the pandemonium and synergy created by the play, even more than that generated by *Lord Edward Fitzgerald*:

I have been present in many noisy assemblies, but never in such a noisy one as that assembled in the Queen's Theatre on the afternoon of December 26th, 1898, to witness the first performance on any stage of J.W. Whitbread's romantic Irish Drama, in four acts, entitled "Theobald Wolf Tone." [...] I think all the small boy population of Dublin tried to scrooge itself into the limited space of the gallery, so that they were fairly on top of one another, and those under had to assert themselves by shouting at those over them not to squash the life out of them. Such a pandemonium of discordant sound I have seldom heard, and at times one could scarcely hear one's ears, especially when the villains held the stage.⁶²

He generally approved of the play itself, or what he could hear of it in the encompassing excitement and commotion:

As far as I could judge by the scraps of dialogue I heard here and there from those on the stage, I should say that the quality of the writing was much above average, while in dramatic construction and stage effects it far surpassed anything yet attempted in its way by the popular manager of the theatre – Mr. J.W. Whitbread's [...] "Wolfe Tone" (though cast on melodramatic mould) is a distinct cut above the usual sensational play.⁶³

⁶² Herr, p. 9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

The Evening Herald, in its critical notice, celebrated the play's gravity and realism:

He is thoroughly in sympathy with Ireland. He has caught the vernacular. He draws his characters naturally and puts on his colour with a broad, bold brush. Of his Irish characters he is a master. [...] The dialogue is witty; it is natural, it is convincing. There is action, there is energy, there is deep human interest in the play [...] and the audience follows it with the deepest interest.⁶⁴

Holloway also welcomed its realism and the depiction of Irish characters without resorting to comic stereotypes or low broguery:

I noticed, with extreme pleasure, the entire absence of buffoonery in the comic interludes. [...] It is a step in the right direction to try to create a new type of Irish play without too much of the "arraah-begorra" element in it, so inseparable from the old form of Irish drama, where everybody, from the highest to the lowest, spoke with the vulgarest brogue (often mingled with a Cockney accent).

Why not have educated Irishmen and women speak, as in everyday life, as Mr. Whitbread has endeavoured in this play to make them do? We have had enough and plenty of Irish caricatures on stage, God knows, in the past; let us have a little of the genuine article now by way of a change.⁶⁵

Holloway was looking at the political implications of the play, the restoration of dignity to Irish history and public life, and he over-argues his case. Many playwrights prior to Whitbread had rendered Irish speech on stage as plain English; what is annoying Holloway here is his experience of visiting English companies that relegated the Irish characters in their productions to their 'low' comedian, who was a jack-of- all-accent, but apparently, master of none.

A running theme in the critical appraisal of the play is praise for its realism and naturalistic approach, a surprising verdict given our modern apprehension of melodrama.

The Evening Herald called it 'a realistic presentment of a series of episodes the most

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

interesting in the romantic history of our land.'⁶⁶ These melodramas were believed by the audience to show Irish history as it actually was, a realistic historicism in the dialogue, in the characters and in the actions. This dramatic canon was, ironically, the reference against which the Abbey's later, naturalistic, plays were to be checked and found wanting. The Queen's melodramas were nothing of the sort, of course. What Whitbread, Bourke and Co. did was to take the fractured, disjunctive and frequently contradictory elements of history, especially 1798, and hammer them into a coherent melodramatic shape that is more propaganda than fact, a binary narrative of heroes and villains, of loyalists and informers, of idealism and betrayal, of black and white, of good and bad, which maintains only a tenuous hold on the facts, but has a mythical coherence that took, and still holds, the high moral ground.

Whitbread caught the mood of the moment perfectly. *The United Irishman* said of his plays: 'They are certainly steps in the right direction. [...] These plays will do good, and the Irish Stage, if we may call our theatres such, would be the better of many more of their class.'⁶⁷ Holloway felt that the plays of Whitbread were realistic and politically relevant: 'This is the sort of play that will ultimately put a new spirit into Ireland.'⁶⁸ Even Malone, who holds the plays in low esteem, admits the attraction they exercised: 'They were poor plays, mainly melodrama of the most vivid kind, but they made history real for many thousands of people.'⁶⁹ The reviewer of *The Dublin Evening Mail* of January 1903 still believed that Whitbread's historical melodramas showed Irish history 'with historical precision.'⁷⁰ They consider the plays to be realistic because they do not trouble the surface of national respectability. The advances in scenery, costume, lighting and spectacle combined to bolster the illusion of peering into the eighteenth century.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁷ Morash, p. 114.

⁶⁸ Herr, p. 9.

⁶⁹ Malone, p. 17.

⁷⁰ Watt, p. 47.

Whitbread's foreignness shows in his ignorance of the rural: the plays are totally urban; there is none of the passionate, mystical attachment to land that underlies Boucicault, and surfaces even more strongly in the plays of the Abbey. In Whitbread, the characters are fuelled by abstractions, not by clay, grass and stones, but the plays fitted precisely to the audience and the time. Whitbread declared in an interview: 'The stage is the pulpit of the nineteenth century,'⁷¹ and this apprehended historical accuracy is in fact a narrow nationalist vision, an almost religious, romantic dream. In Hubert O'Grady's play *The Fenians* those attacking the prison van in Manchester flaunted ludicrous green uniforms, and Michael Dwyer and his merry men wore emerald green hiding in the Wicklow Mountains in Whitbread's play, *The Insurgent Chief*.⁷²

They also sinned by omission, as no scenes or comments derogatory of Irish life were tolerated. The plays of the Queen's encountered the same ideological censorship that the Abbey later did. Maud Gonne and Douglas Hyde could see no reason for Irish plays that did not further the nationalist orthodoxy: 'When art ceases to be national, it will cease to be artistic for nationality is the breath of art.'⁷³ Even Fitzmaurice's comedy *The Country Dressmaker* (1907) was criticized for omitting any mention of the National Question; *The Evening Telegraph* complained: 'There is no breath of the Gaelic League in the whole play, and no suggestion of the new National spirit which is sweeping over the country.'⁷⁴ The Queen's plays could not be faulted on that count, but were criticised when they dared to show the underbelly of Irish society, producing a counter-assertion of nationalist respectability and a flat denial of the Dionysiac elements in Irish life – the same problem that Synge encountered. Prefiguring the row about *The Plough and the Stars*, Robert Johnston's *The Old Land* (1903), a prize-winning drama on a patriotic

⁷¹ Seamus De Búrca, *The Queen's Royal Theatre (1829-1969)* (Dublin: Folens, 1983), p. 16.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷³ D.E.S. Maxwell, *A critical history of Modern Irish Drama, 1891-1980* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 19

⁷⁴ Robert Hogan & James Kilroy, *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-1909* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 171.

theme, was damned for having a scene set in a public house. *The Freeman's Journal* sniffed that 'a table covered with bottles, presumably of strong drink, and suggestive of deep potations, is an accessory that might well be dispensed with.'⁷⁵

This feeling of realism that the plays provoked was caused, not by their historical accuracy, but by their intense relevance to the concerns of the audience, as they elided the century and the deferred opportunity of 1798 re-appeared. This closing of the temporal circle occurs most obviously in *Wolfe Tone*, where the ending of the play invites an aftermath different from the brutal historical truth. Having seen to the death or neutralization of the informers, Tone is about to sail from France with thousands of French troops amidst high hopes for his success:

 TONE Only a week and beloved country I shall see you once again.
 Once more feel your green turf beneath my feet, breathe again your
 life-giving air. [...] At last the triumph of my life approaches – the goal
 I have longed for is in sight. [...] Three months hence and you will be
 with me in dear old Dublin once again.⁷⁶

Tone's mission ended in defeat and death, but the play ends on a note of high optimism that carried the audience; Tone's opportunity is re-created, and the 'invitation to action and basis of hope'⁷⁷ collapses the century so that the end of the play opens, not on to the disaster of 1798, but on to the possibilities of 1898.

Unlike *Lord Edward*, there are no aristocrats in *Wolfe Tone*. It is a middle-class melodrama, pointing the way to P.J. Bourke's plays of the urban and rural lower class. The simplicity of melodrama requires heroes and villains to be instantly recognizable, and Boucicault uses aristocratic readymades, but with an ambiguous twist. Whitbread,

⁷⁵ Watt, p. 44.

⁷⁶ *Wolfe Tone*, IV. 1. in Herr, p. 255.

⁷⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 187.

following Boucicault's lead, uses Lord Edward Fitzgerald as a hero and kits him out in the usual aristocratic virtues. Wolfe Tone won't quite fit, as the son of a coach-maker, but his Trinity education and the egalitarianism flowing from the Revolution, added to his attractive personal qualities, enabled him to move with ease among the Ascendancy, or at least among that sector of them that embraced liberal ideas. His middle-class background, however, poses a stylistic problem for Whitbread, which he solves by having Tone make a virtue of his poverty, pointing to it as a pledge of his honesty when challenged by Napoleon. He is also treated as a gentleman by his inferiors, and evaluated as such by Napoleon's wife, Josephine: 'He has ze grande air ov command; ze mannare, zat compels respect, love, admiration.'⁷⁸ So that Whitbread, harking back to Shadwell, creates a bourgeois hero with Ascendancy virtues.

Running parallel to the creation of this eloquent middle-class, or later, working-class patriot, however, is another strand in Irish Nationalist Melodrama that runs counter to Boucicault and openly demonises the Ascendancy.

Boucicault's relative benignity towards the ruling class is not mirrored by his contemporaries or successors, perhaps reflecting a lesser penetration by them of the English theatrical circuit. Boucicault's villains are usually middlemen or agents, his heroes aristocrats, however decayed. But his contemporary, Edmund Falconer, successful actor and playwright, and perhaps the nearest thing Boucicault had to a rival in Ireland, did not scruple to cast an Ascendancy landlord as a full-blown villain in his play *Eileen Oge; or, Dark's the Hour before the Dawn* (1871). Henry Loftus is a more sinister version of Hardress Cregan, and indeed the whole play is packed with echoes of *The Colleen Bawn*. The setting is '*A picturesque Irish landscape; on an eminence is the*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, III. 5. p. 245.

*porch of an ivy-wreathed chapel, and a winding path descends [...] to a cottage. [...] Woodbines growing up left and right of door and over window. [...] Flower beds on either side of door.'*⁷⁹ Loftus and his evil agent, the Danny-Mann-like Scotsman, M'Lean, bring, in best melodramatic fashion, economic and legal pressure to bear on the heroine, Eileen Oge, and on her family, in order to coerce her into marrying Loftus, the nephew of the local landlord. First they prevent her marriage to Pat O'Donnell by evicting him without cause, so that the young couple will have nowhere to live. When that doesn't work, Loftus has a letter forged to his own uncle, purportedly from O'Donnell, threatening him with violence for that eviction:

You have been on trial for a long time, for the many unjust acts you and your agents have done to decent people, and your having given notice to Patrick O'Donnell that you are going to take the home over his head, and having threatened him with legal process to turn him off his land, you have completed the measure of your crimes, so you have been found guilty and condemned to die. If you dare to carry your threat into execution, or to molest O'Donnell, you'll be shot from behind a hedge, or a hayrick, and your brains scattered to the four winds, to give a red vengeance to O'Donnell.⁸⁰

O'Donnell is convicted and transported, and Loftus intensifies the economic pressure on Eileen until she is faced with the dilemma of marrying him or seeing her entire family thrown out on the side of the road. She is forced to agree, but O'Donnell is pardoned and returns in the nick of time, rescuing her as she walks to the altar. Loftus is exposed, and, in spite of his Ascendancy landlord status, and in marked contrast to *The Colleen Bawn*, he is made to feel the full force of the law, in the form of the newly organized police force: 'I am Henry Loftus of Loftus Hall, a gentleman and landed proprietor, sufficiently responsible to resist your authority,' he blusters, but is handcuffed and exits humiliatingly '*guarded by peelers, Sergeant, etc.*'⁸¹

⁷⁹ Edmund Falconer, *Eileen Oge; or, Dark's the Hour before the Dawn*, French's Acting Edition (London: Samuel French, n.d.) p. 1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, I. 2. p. 12.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, IV. 4. p. 59.

Eileen Oge follows the usual melodramatic pattern, in its villains, heroes, and action. The characters are types, but it has some endearing idiosyncrasies. One of the characters is a Cockney servant, whose dialogue is written phonetically, and who is despised by the Irish characters because of his inability to speak properly; they are of the opinion that he should be 'hanged for the murder of the king's English.'⁸² As a melodrama it works very well; Falconer has learned a lot from *The Colleen Bawn*, showing an Irish bucolic utopia, threatened by upper-class corruption, and saved by the courage and sacrifice of the wily peasants, and the neutrality of a police force independent of local magnates. The false threat to the landlord is a surprisingly direct reference to the Land War to have got past the censor, as the play was not confined to Ireland, being licensed by the Lord Chamberlain for the Princess Theatre in London in 1871.⁸³

Hubert O'Grady was another Queen's stalwart whose plays not only boosted nationalist feeling at home, but raised awareness abroad. *The Evening Herald* wrote in his obituary notice in 1899, echoing Whitbread's comment on the stage as a pulpit:

Mr. O'Grady wrote many Irish plays, and toured with them for several years. They were not marked by any high literary excellence, yet they were rough and ready bits of Irish sentiment, unpolished stones in a way, but of value. In many an English town his play *Eviction* was a sermon preached from behind the footlights and appealed to popular feeling in a curiously successful fashion.⁸⁴

O'Grady first big success was on the stage as Conn in the first Irish production of *The Shaughraun* at the Queen's; he went on to have a successful career as actor and playwright, at the head of a company that toured extensively in Ireland and in Britain. His plays conform to the usual Queen's stereotype, with their clear-cut villains, heroes,

⁸² *Ibid.*, I. 1 p. 5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Title page.

⁸⁴ *The Evening Herald*, 22 December 1899, p. 4, col. 7; Stephen Watt, 'The Plays of Hubert O'Grady', in *Journal of Irish Literature: A Hubert O'Grady Supplement*, 14 (Jan. 1985), p. 3.

values and ideology. Occasionally, his sense of humour leads him to puncture the pomposity of the nationalist sentiments however. In his play *Famine* (1886), performed early in Whitbread's reign at the Queen's, he gives to Father Barry the lines:

Keep up your hearts, brighter days are in store and hope for our poor country. And I hope we may live to see her with her own Parliament controlling her domestic affairs and "Eviction", "Famine," and "Emigration" banished forever from our native land.⁸⁵

This seems a straightforward piece of catchpenny rhetoric in support of Home Rule until we realize that *Eviction*, *Famine* and *Emigration* are in fact the names of three plays written by O'Grady himself.

His play *The Famine* (1886) updates the patriotic melodrama by including the repercussions of the Land War, and the attempts by a former landlord to get even with the tenants who have bested him. The villain is Sackvill, a member of the Ascendancy whose family has been devastated and whose estates have been lost by the tenants' refusal to pay the rents. He has got a job as overseer of Famine relief, and exploits his position to get revenge on Vincent O'Connor, whom he blames for his loss. O'Connor had been the first to refuse to pay, and all the other tenants had followed his example. But now famine has struck, and Sackvill starves O'Connor and his family to death by refusing to give him any relief work, and having him arrested for stealing a loaf of bread. In the play, Sackvill is shot from behind a hedge, as the letter in Falconer's play threatened, by his even more evil sidekick Sadler, but their villainy is partially balanced by the impartiality of Sir Richard Raymond, and the goodness of his daughter, Lady Alice.

⁸⁵ Hubert O'Grady, *Famine*, Prologue, Sc. 1. in *Journal of Irish Literature: A Hubert O'Grady Supplement*, 14 (Jan. 1985) p. 27.

P.J. Bourke's *For the Land She Loved* is unique in having its main conflict between a heroine and a villainess – Betsy Gray and Lady Nugent. Against the background of the 1798 rebellion, Lady Nugent spends the play trying to part Betsy Gray from her lover, Robert Munro, who has chosen Betsy over her. The portrayal of Ascendancy figures has become more extreme, and Lady Nugent is almost devoid of scruple in her pursuit; she lies, cheats and murders in order to be revenged on the lovers, including ambushing a landlord from behind a hedge and pinning the blame on one of the rebels. In the last scene, the two women fight, first with pistols, then with swords; Betsy kills her, and she dies with style, refusing to beg or forgive.

Whitbread's *Lord Edward* and *Wolfe Tone* take a fairly benign attitude to the ruling class, but by the time he was writing *The Ulster Hero* (1902) his focus of virtue had shifted towards the common people. His plays, after *Lord Edward* take the 'generous' qualities and gifts them to non-aristocratic bourgeois characters. Henry Joy McCracken is a bourgeois capitalist and the articulator of the doctrine of patriotism and sacrifice, and violent opposition to the upper class:

Better that every Irishman in this fair land of ours should shed the last drop of his life's blood to throw off the yoke of serfdom, than to rot and die the slaves of a mischievous party of miserable aristocrats.⁸⁶

All of these plays had more than a theatrical footprint; they also had an educational or apologetic role. Melodrama has a didactic basis – a raising of consciousness among the lower classes, an awakening to the awareness of shared wrongs, a presentation of a pattern for the alleviation of these complaints by solidarity and some action or refusal to accept the norms laid down by a corrupt or uncaring ruling class - a proposal, in fact, of

⁸⁶ Watt, 'Boucicault and Whitbread,' p. 48.

an alternative ideology. Irish Nationalist melodrama follows the pattern of melodrama set out above but adds the dimension, not just of oppression, but colonial oppression, and so becomes intensely political in the narrow sense of kindling and nourishing the hope and expectation of national freedom. We have seen this pattern evolve through the late work of Boucicault and the innovations of Whitbread, but it comes to fruition in the work of P.J. Bourke (1883-1932). In Bourke, the theme of reconciliation and accommodation that has persisted since the work of Philips in the late seventeenth century is finally overthrown. Also in Bourke, the economic arguments that had always fuelled the debate are abandoned at last in favour of a clean political separation; in a political storm, only villains pursue economic advantage. Bourke also completes the final proletarianisation of the drama in Ireland. Boucicault and Whitbread had working-class or peasant characters who were covertly the heroes of their plays. The entire plot of *Wolfe Tone*, for example, turns on the character, actions and influence of Shane, the Trinity scout, although the central focus appears to be on Wolfe Tone. Even more than Whitbread, Bourke paves the way for O'Casey in two ways: one is by focusing his plays on the lives of working-class urban or labouring country people, and secondly, he breaks new ground by making a woman, Betsy Gray, the hero and centre of *For the Land She Loved*. The plain people of Dublin and of Ireland could see their lives reflected in the plays of Bourke, but those lives transformed and ennobled by the aspirations to freedom.

Whitbread's plays generally inhabit a middle-class world, but Bourke moves us firmly into the world of the working class. In his plays, finally, the heroic qualities of *générosité* migrate to the Irish working or rural classes. In Bourke, Herr observes: 'the ordinary worker-as-hero found his or her place on the Queen's stage.'⁸⁷ This is too sweeping, and ignores Boucicault's *Shaun the Post* and *Arrah Meelish*, Michael Dwyer

⁸⁷ Herr, p. 55.

or Anne Devlin in *Robert Emmet*, Shane in Whitbread's *Wolfe Tone*, O'Keeffe's good soldier Pat, or Felix the mountain radical, all of whom preceded him. Bourke, however, goes further and gives the virtues and linguistic skills of the well-bred to peasants and workers, as Knowles did. Bourke's urban heroes and heroines were enormously popular and provide the crucial link to O'Casey, in that the characters achieve aspirational, visionary status. They are propaganda in the sense that they embody, preach and project a set of values and beliefs designed to encourage and enable lasting revolutionary change.

Bourke's proletarian protagonists are as patriotically eloquent and high-minded as any of Whitbread's Historical Heroes. The blending of the personal and the political, that was such a feature of Knowles, is even more overt in Bourke. For example, in *When Wexford Rose* (1910), Donal O'Byrne kills Captain Hoursley of the Wexford Yeomanry. Hoursley is the wicked guardian of O'Byrne's sweetheart, and has been stealing her money and forcing her to marry an English colonel with whom he is in conspiracy in order to save his own skin. But as he kills him, O'Byrne declaims: 'So perish all who hold this land in bondage,'⁸⁸ making a direct connection between the real oppressed woman under economic attack and the 'distressful country' that is held in subjection.

The play itself, like all of these plays, is an alternative present encoded. 'For Ireland and Liberty',⁸⁹ they shout, and Fr. Murphy declares: 'peace shall never again be restored until an Irish Republic is declared.'⁹⁰— aligning the play and its audience with the extreme tendency during the Home Rule agitation. The play ends, as did Whitbread's *Wolfe Tone*, with the evocation of unfinished business, as Donal goes off to France for help:

⁸⁸ P.J. Bourke, *When Wexford Rose*, I. 2. , in Herr, p. 271.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, II. 2. p. 281.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, II. 2. p. 279.

HOLT Remember Donal, we shall be keeping the heather ablaze until
 you return.

DONAL And I can never know true happiness, General, until I take my
 place once more with the men of Wicklow and Wexford in the struggle
 for Independence.⁹¹

The above exchange unites the agitation of 1910 with the mandate of 1798 that is used to give it continuity and legitimacy. The fudge that Boucicault pulled off with his sentimental, bagpipe-and-kilt sort of patriotism is pulled aside by Bourke to promote violent revolutionary republicanism.

The Queen's educated its audience, and developed over the years from 1880 a consensus of historical drama that rapidly became set in stone. Any deviation from this orthodoxy, especially by the Abbey, was sure to produce a hostile response. The Abbey treatment of Irish concerns was evaluated by the historically, politically and melodramatically literate Dublin audience, who brought to the Abbey a well-developed sense of what they expected to see, that had been shaped and honed at the Queen's and the other Dublin venues, professional and amateur.

The Queen's was considered as the National Theatre by its audiences long after the founding of the Abbey. The Abbey was outside the experience of many theatre-going Dubliners, as was exemplified by their behaviour at P.J. Bourke's *For the Land She Loved* in 1915. They tended to see it as an Ascendancy project; the Abbey's habit of having a special season to coincide with Horse Show Week was not calculated to alleviate proletarian or nationalist sensibilities, and Yeats' lofty tone of 'You have disgraced yourselves again' gives a good example of the distance between management and audience on the night of the *Playboy* riot. In fact, the behaviour of the audience at *The Playboy of the Western World* was not qualitatively different from the usual form at

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, IV. 3. p. 308.

the Queen's. This was an audience accustomed to unleashing its disapproval without restraint, but the Abbey was not used to such aggressive candour. As a result of the presentation of *For the Land She Loved*, Dublin Castle rebuked the manager, St. John Ervine, for allowing dissension to be fomented in his theatre, and he agreed never to admit a play by Bourke into the Abbey again⁹² – a curiously cosy alliance between the Castle authorities and the Literary Theatre to exclude the nationalist and proletarian influence. The audience sometimes felt it was being deliberately insulted by the Abbey authorities: their furious reaction to Synge was balanced by their acceptance of Fitzmaurice, whose portrayal of Irish life is far harsher and uglier, but was praised for its verisimilitude. Holloway commented:

Irish people can stand any amount of hard things being said about them if there is truth at the back of them, but what they won't stand for a moment is libellous falsehoods such as those contained in *'The Playboy'*, and such foreign-tainted stuff that makes them out sensual blackguards, cruel monsters, and irreligious brutes.⁹³

The audience could see themselves in Fitzmaurice, and in Whitbread, Bourke, Allen and the playwrights of the Queen's, but the Abbey's vision of Ireland often seemed alien, even to Holloway.

The Queen's was, to its audience, both the National Theatre and the Nationalist Theatre; they liked a whiff of nationalist brimstone in their Irish plays. Seamus de Búrca, PJ Bourke's son, writes:

They're inclined to think that the Abbey was national all the time. But the real national theatre – certainly up to 1916 and I would suggest up to about 1923 – was the Queen's Theatre. They were putting on all these nationalist

⁹² Séamus de Búrca, *The Queen's Royal Theatre (1829-1969)* (Dublin: Folens, 1983) p. 4

⁹³ Howard K. Slaughter, intro. to *George Fitzmaurice, The Realistic Plays* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970), p. ix.

plays. [...] I've maintained that the heart of Ireland was kept alive by what they put on in the Queen's .⁹⁴

But there was a price to be paid in literary standards. All of these plays are well-constructed but only adequately written, with few flashes of fire. The characters are predictable, and the language veers from the high-rhetoric of dogmatic patriotism to irritating peasant drollery, with the villains, as usual, getting the best of the lines. The plays all have a family resemblance, like a degenerate brood of Boucicault. Where he used a strand of sentimental patriotism, the others are completely under the influence of what Sean O'Faoláin calls 'emotional nationalism.'⁹⁵ With his Irish plays, Boucicault effectively appropriated the drama for Ireland, as the Irish had appropriated the English language over the centuries. Malone says that it was his Irish Trilogy that 'almost for the first time gave to Ireland a drama which had some connection with the life and thought of the people.'⁹⁶ We have seen that this is not true, but the popularity of his portrayal of Irish life gave a sense of worth to the people. The Irish drama had never fallen completely under the sway of politics, though it often reflected political concerns, so that Boucicault's work, while partaking subtly of political and social debate, is not in need of what O'Faoláin calls 'Dedavisisation.' Writing of Davis and the Young Irelanders, O'Faoláin says:

They did not devote their great talents to literature: they devoted them to literature in the interests of politics. [...] Before a literary movement could develop in a strictly literary way Irish writers had to purify literature of this political impurity.⁹⁷

Boucicault did not fall into the Davis trap, but paradoxically, his successors did; paradoxically, because in correctly turning their attention to Irish life and history as their subject matter, they took to looking at it through an ideological lens; they arranged it as

⁹⁴ *The Journal of Irish Literature*, 13 (Jan-May 1984), p. 78.

⁹⁵ Sean O'Faoláin, *The Irish*, Pelican Books (West Drayton Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1947), p. 139.

⁹⁶ Malone, p. 17.

⁹⁷ O'Faoláin, p. 132.

they thought it ought to be rather than showing what was there. Boucicault's heroes are real, with their own idiosyncrasies and failings; those of the Whitbread and Bourke school have none. They are morality figures rather than real characters; their dialogue has the imprimatur of nationalist orthodoxy, and the plays have the rigidity of medieval Moralities. It was from this iron and unquestioning acceptance of nationalist ideology that the Abbey had to rescue Irish drama and drag it from its closed self-congratulatory consensus.

The importance of the Queen's school of playwrights has been underestimated, however, blocked out by the intervening success of the early Abbey. The plays of Falconer, Whitbread, Bourke, Allen, and O'Grady traversed the country for decades, at least until the Second World War, intimately known and treasured by the people, reflecting an agreed interpretation of history, a shared myth of nation-making, unruffled by emerging facts or contrary opinions. Their politics is greater than their art; their nationalist dogma of fidelity and betrayal, of sacrifice and resurrection, was so powerful that even the early Abbey writers conform to it. To an habitu   of the Queen's, Cathleen N   Houlihan says nothing new; she preaches exactly the same message as Whitbread's Lord Edward or Bourke's Betsy Gray, expressing the monolithic, even megalithic, nationalist mind-set. Only the great iconoclasts, Synge, O'Casey, Shaw or Johnston, attacked and upset it in a series of dramatic masterpieces: *The Playboy of the Western World*, *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars*, *John Bull's Other Island*, or *The Old Lady Says 'No.'* This deviancy, this fearless acuity and truth-telling was not welcomed by nationalist orthodoxy, nor in the case of Shaw and Johnston, by the Abbey authorities. The strong, consistent audience involvement at the Queen's was an integral part of the dramatic experience at that theatre, which turned a night at the theatre into a sort of patriotic rally. What happens on the stage, according to Karen Gaylord is the 'inner

frame' of the drama; what happens in the auditorium in response is the 'outer frame,' and the two lock together to form the dramatic artefact.⁹⁸ In the normal melodrama, this 'outer frame' is confined to hissing the villain, cheering the arrival of the hero to rescue the heroine, or tears for the death of Little Nell, but with the Irish Nationalist Melodrama, an added dimension accrues. Frantz Fanon teaches that the colonised writer's duty is to model a free future and give hope and inspiration to his oppressed people. Colonial society and culture, the coloniser and the colonised, are bound together, seemingly indissolubly. The function of literature in such a society, writes Fanon, is to imagine a model whereby the tendons and ligaments connecting the two may be severed, and to prefigure a viable, improved society proceeding from the operation:

Colonised man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope. But to ensure that hope and give it form, he must take part in action and throw himself body and soul into the national struggle.⁹⁹

It is not too fanciful to suggest that the Queen's melodramas, with their incandescent ideology, and in their interaction with their audience, not just in Dublin, but all over the country, went a long way not just to suggest, but to create a revolution.

In an excess of French logic, Fanon writes that it is the primary duty of the writer, not to write, but to take active part in the struggle: for a writer this participation in the struggle will automatically produce the writing:

To take part in the [...] revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Mary Trotter, *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of Irish Dramatic Movement* (Syracuse: University Press, 2001), p.64.

⁹⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁰ Sekou Touré, "The political leader as the representative of culture', Address to the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Rome, 1959', in *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 166.

This is not necessarily so, and undervalues the 'elitist' act of writing, dismissing the work necessary to produce it, in favour of the 'egalitarian' act of physical resistance. Karl Marx is nearer the mark when he highlights the primary importance of creating alternative ideologies, because 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.'¹⁰¹ The dominant ideology of a colonised or oppressed people, he says, is the ideology of the coloniser or oppressor. What the writers of the Celtic Revival did was to create an alternative ideology, based on the values and myths that had run underground for centuries, and the melodramas that emanated from the Queen's writers played a key role in mediating that ideology into mainstream Irish life. Boucicault manoeuvred towards it, and Whitbread and Bourke's greatest achievement was not in any literary excellence that they achieved, which was minimal, but in creating and implementing that ideology in the 'outer frame' of the Queen's. The fact that the ideology was rehearsed and implemented, not by passive reading or absorption, but by the overt fusion of energy between stage and the auditorium, where the dominant ideology was suspended for the duration and replaced by a nationalist consensus, political declaration and embryonic action, puts the Queen's melodramas into the Fanon category of action rather than art. Inevitably, the ideology broke out of the frame into the consciousness of the country at large. The plays of Whitbread and Bourke were one of the agents by which nationalist ideology replaced the colonial as the dominant paradigm. As a popular form, the melodrama was in an unbeatable position to preach, as Whitbread remarked, and for up to sixty years, from 1880 to 1940, these plays were played all over the country by fit-up companies and amateur societies, codifying, implementing and supporting the ideology and myths of the Irish nation-state, that was, as often as not, coming under attack at the Abbey. Yeats' worry about his play sending out certain men the English shot is a piece of unnecessary self-importance. If anyone is to be blamed, it is the playwrights of the

¹⁰¹ *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 176.

Queen's and the long tradition they provided of Irish Nationalist Melodrama.

Conclusion

English colonists created the Irish theatre, originally for the use and amusement of the courtiers of Dublin Castle: it expressed their concerns and reflected their interests and preoccupations. Irish theatre's intimate connection with that society made it inevitably political, exploring its relationship with its adopted country, and the distance from England, the political magnetic pole. The first known production, *Gorboduc* in 1601, already shows the appearance of the political apologetics that were to run through Irish plays up to the beginning of the twentieth century.

The first theatre, founded at Werburgh St. in 1634, attracted James Shirley as its resident playwright; Shirley held a mirror to the aristocratic society that clustered around the Lord Lieutenant, Thomas Wentworth. He also began the process of encoding a founding myth for the colonists, a historical justification for their presence and hegemony in Ireland with his play *St. Patrick for Ireland* in 1640. This play asserts their superiority over the native Irish, and thereby their right to rule. In *St. Patrick for Ireland* the Irish aristocracy are dissolute pagans and buffoons. Irish culture is shown as immoral and decadent, needing to be replaced by the benignity and reason of English influence. But Burnell's *Landgartha* rebuts this and displays the oppositions and political strains within Irish theatre and colonial society.

After the Restoration, the aristocracy was still in control of the new theatre at Smock Alley. The type of Restoration play favoured in Dublin was Rhyming Heroic Tragedy. Only aristocrats appear in Heroic Tragedy, uttering elevated thoughts on Love and Honour in rhyming couplets. The 'little circle of *grands seigneurs*'¹ at Dublin preferred to see themselves in this heroic guise, as a bridgehead of civilization in a savage

¹ Stockwell, p. 53

country. In *The Generall*, the first of the Heroic Tragedies, the Earl of Orrerry, continues the political exegesis that is endemic in Irish plays: Orrerry uses the play to justify his apostasy during the Civil War, and Catherine Philips' *Pompey* proposes an amnesty for the disloyal.

Irish comedy did not make an appearance until 1699, when William Philips wrote *St. Stephen's Green; or, The Generous Lovers*, the first contemporary portrait of Irish Ascendancy society. In order to break the dependence on English dramatic imports, the play is set around Stephen's Green, with a cast of mostly Irish characters. At its heart lies the Molyneux doctrine that Ireland was not a colony but a separate kingdom; superior in its moral and ethical standards, Philips adds.

Irish drama's relentless intimacy with its society promoted narcissistic self-examination, and *St. Stephen's Green* and Farquhar's work begin to take on the central concern: what constitutes a gentleman in this society? Who belongs and who doesn't? The accepted wisdom is that an Estate makes a gentleman. But the puzzle in *St. Stephen's Green* is the character Freelove, who has no estate, yet is still clearly a gentleman. The key to gentility, the plays say, is not wealth or material possessions, or even elevated manners and speech, which can be learned by close study. It lies in the quality of his mind – his *générosité*. Freelove and Aemilia are *The Generous Lovers*, even though they haven't got a shilling between them.

The question is posed negatively too, in this and other plays of the period: when is gentility false? Farquhar is exercised by it, and fear of imposters becomes a major theme in the work of Charles Shadwell.

The opposite of generous is mercenary, and between 1715 and 1720 Charles Shadwell dealt with the triumphant Dublin mercenary class. The middle-classes have moved from being the butt of jokes in James Shirley's drama to being the centre of gravity of Shadwell's. His plays deal with merchants, bankers, and the lesser gentry, whose status is determined by their income. The plays are dominated by commercial imagery. The older aristocracy is, in Shadwell's plays, a sort of distant myth; he writes for and about the Irish 'bourgeois gentry'.

But his most intriguing play is the one that is set outside Dublin, in Fingall. For *Irish Hospitality; or, Virtue Rewarded* Irish country life among the Gentry is portrayed on the stage for the first time. To Shadwell, Fingall is a land of possibility, where different patterns of Ascendancy attitudes and models of character and behaviour can be explored. He portrays it as a Whig Commonwealth, in which the boundaries of class and race melt and dissolve, and status and advancement are determined by merit instead of birth. Shadwell suggests that the next evolutionary step is the marriage between the native Irish and the Anglo-Irish, between the tenant and the landlord, between the peasant and the Ascendancy.

The founding myth of the Anglo-Protestants – that they were civilizing a barbarous country – became unstable during the early part of the eighteenth century as the extent of the culture and refinement of early Irish civilization became known to them. The response of the playwrights to this knowledge was to take the example of James Shirley and colonize this history and myth, using it to legitimize their presence and rule.

The object of William Philips' play *Hibernia Freed* (1722) is to place the converted native Irish gentry at the head of the Ascendancy, an act of identification with the

mythical and historical spirit of the country by a planter-playwright. Philips bathes the ancient Irish in the glow of Classical imagery. The Irish aristocrats are a race of culture and refinement, of honour and a high moral tone. Philips uses classical names, especially Hibernia. 'Hibernia' is the Irish Protestant Nation called into being by the eighteenth century playwrights – a free state of Protestant Aristocrats, growing naturally and legally out of ancient Ireland, a Utopia without a resentful Catholic sub-class or English interference.

Shadwell, too, in his play of *Rotherick O'Connor* (1720) annexes Irish history for 'Hibernia', and suggests, as he did in *Irish Hospitality*, an alternative society in which the two tribes merge. Shadwell's play, like Philips', is part of the ongoing artistic attempt to copperfasten the legality of the English presence in Ireland. 'They shall succeed, invited to our aid, and mix their blood with ours, one people grow,'² as Philips wrote. Force is not enough; the consent and participation of the Irish is needed to fashion 'Hibernia' into a viable nation.

The playwrights were generally out of line; the picture that they give us is not the true one; the image is not the reality. What we see in the plays is an inclusive Utopian society; the reality was a sectarian Protestant state that is symbolized in Ashton's *The Battle of Aughrim*.

The Anglo-Irish frequently complained about the inaccuracy of the portrayal of the Irishman on stage during the eighteenth century, but the problem was in their minds, not on the stage. With rare exceptions, the Irish characters in eighteenth century plays are sympathetically-drawn Gentry. The problem for the Hibernians was that all of these

2 William Philips *Hibernia Freed*, V. in Wheatley & Donovan, I, p. 295.

characters were drawn from the Gaelic-Irish tradition. Beginning with Thomas Sheridan's Captain O'Blunder in 1738 there is a line of flamboyant Irish-Hibernian Gentlemen in the eighteenth century drama who express the essence of 'Hibernia'. One half of the 'Hibernian' psyche approved, but the other half was reluctant to be represented by such rowdy, disreputable members.

With Murrough O'Dogherty, in *The True-born Irishman*, the process is at its clearest. Charles Macklin speaks directly for this sector of society – the underground Irish gentry that have come to the surface, but show no interest in climbing higher. To do so would be to betray themselves, their names and their roots. They are rooted in their Irishness, and have no need to purloin a history or invent a story to legitimize themselves. Yet for all his Gaelic truculence O'Dogherty does represent the beginning of a synthesis of the two tendencies, the responsible bourgeois and the creative anarchist, into one unhyphenated Ascendancy type. The Ascendancy as displayed on the stage is now the bourgeois gentry: they are the audience, as they are the stage characters; the nobility has vanished from behind the proscenium arch as they have from the auditorium, and the Gentry have it to themselves, but not for long.

John O'Keeffe was soon writing Irish plays in which he set the fault lines in Ireland along class lines, rather than tribal ones. To him, the Irish Ascendancy are all unhyphenated Irish, but his interest is directed at the lower classes, not the upper; his revolutionary spirit causes him to move the aristocrats and gentlemen politely to the side.

The Ascendancy appeared on the stage through the nineteenth century in increasingly alienated and marginalized characterizations: the entire idea of aristocratic worth and

rule is assailed with ferocious clarity by James Sheridan Knowles, and the rights of the common people fiercely asserted.

Boucicault takes a more benign view and shows us the Ascendancy as a picturesque ruin, attractive in certain lights, but basically useless, while the Nationalist melodramas begin by tentatively casting an aristocrat in the role of articulate spokesman for the new Irish nationalism, but rapidly move to awarding that role to a middle-class spokesman. When P.J. Bourke gives it to a member of the working-class, the appropriation of the aristocracy's theatrical estate is complete.

This Old Testament of the Irish theatre, dismissed and ignored for so long, is bound, nerve and sinew into the society that spawned it; it reflects that society, and tries with varying success to forge and form its consciousness.

What is remarkable about this body of work is its consistent political context or sub-text; it is politics transposed into a dramatic key. It is not surprising that the plays of a period and place reflect its 'form and pressure', but what is surprising is the way in which nearly all the playwrights try to lead public opinion, to forge the conscience of the race – in their case the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. From Shirley onward, their relationship with the country, and of the country with them, is mirrored and charted. This is a colonial concern, and indicates the uncertainties and ambivalences that lay under their civilization. The playwrights of the eighteenth century deal consistently with the largely unacknowledged problem of the native population, encouraging and modelling a society to which all sectors on the island could give allegiance and loyalty.

The playwrights were not listened to, and it is significant that the most popular play of the eighteenth century was Frederick Ashton's *The Battle of Aughrim*, which shows unblinkingly the reality of a society sundered on religious and racial lines, rather than the inclusive Utopias of Shadwell, Philips, Dobbs or Howard. Anglo-Irish Ascendancy was, at one level, a performance, but the writers tried, on stage, to influence and direct that performance into more fruitful channels. The display on stage was, however, different from the actuality.

As well as articulating their alternatives in the theatre, publication was an important tool in disseminating the playwrights' ideas. *Landgartha* was published quickly by Burnell to get his point across. *Hibernia Freed*'s inflammatory rhetoric was rushed out in Dublin after its success in London, though apparently too dangerous to stage. *The Siege of Derry* attracted attention only when re-published as a play, and *The Battle of Aughrim*'s perennial popularity carried it into more than twenty-five editions between 1756 and 1840. For publication, Knowles restored the cuts made by the censor in his 'Liberty' plays, and even expanded them to enhance their appeal as 'closet drama'. O'Keeffe presided over the publication of his collected works in 1798, including *Le Grenadier* which was never seen on the stage. The plays were published to expand the debate they originally sparked, and for the authors take the opportunity to further engage with the public. Shadwell apologized for *Rotherick O'Connor*, but still published it; George Colman the Younger justified his inclusion of a less than perfect Irishman in *The Oxonian in Town*; and Sheridan commented ambiguously on his creation of Sir Lucius O'Trigger in the preface to *The Rivals*.

Every body of theatrical work reflects its audience. So it is with the corpus of Irish drama prior to 1900, but because the period is so long, it also reflects the changing nature of that audience. Irish theatre was a form of cultural colonization, a part of the imported culture of the colonists that declared their mental and artistic superiority to the savage natives. In the clearing of civilization they had hacked in the Irish wilderness, they placed their theatre, and James Shirley carved for it a myth of St. Patrick to root and anchor them in this soil. From that point, they gradually extended their pale to embrace and annex other aspects of Irish culture and history.

But colonization works both ways: the colonizer and the colonist need each other, and the alien theatre became an aperture whereby Irish culture and values flowed back into the consciousness of the English of Ireland. The most striking examples of this are the Irish characters that colonized the stage in the latter half of the 18th century – Captain O'Blunder and his successors. The theatre and the drama became part of the dialogue between colonizer and colonized – both on stage in the characters, and off-stage in theatrical disturbances and riots. The colonial superiority evinced in character, attitude and language by Shirley, Orrery and Swift gives way to a more equivocal discourse in Philips and Shadwell, as the founding myth of the English in Ireland collapses in the face of emerging knowledge and the revival of the Gaelic aristocracy.

The great theme of the Old Testament of Irish drama is identity, personal, tribal, racial and national. It is never static. The *Playboy Syndrome* is evident in many plays from the early Irish theatre; it suffuses Irish drama long before Synge created the definitive statement. The playwrights thought that by creating a vivid imaginative model they

could alter reality. *The Playboy of the Western World* is a great play because it presents in archetype a profound truth about the Irish character: the urge to transformation through the imagination. Throughout early Irish drama, the trope consistently recurs of remaking or attempting to remake the self, to create a new shape in the imagination and then pour oneself into it. One of the most striking instances is Rover in *Wild Oats*, who imagines a character and then becomes it; Oscar Wilde does it with Jack Worthing in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and Macklin's alter ego, Murrough O'Dogherty performs it in *The True-born Irishman*.

But there are other variants of the operation on display. All of the sham gentlemen and ladies – Cheatly in *The Sham Prince*, or Mrs. Diggerty in *The True-born Irishman* – attempt the operation unsuccessfully; they are defeated by the intrusion of too much reality. In the plays of John O'Keefe, instead of sham-gentlemen we have sham-peasants who are equally unsuccessful; Donnybrook, Franklin and Fitzroy are baffled in their attempts to sample the reality of peasant life.

The third route is a compromise: the achievement of duality of character. Roebuck and Lovewell, in *Love and a Bottle*, exchange their sober and anarchic characteristics to create the perfect Irish gentleman. Many of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's, Goldsmith's or Macklin's characters display the same colonial duality, as Macklin, Sheridan and Goldsmith did in their own lives. Lieutenant O'Connor in *St. Patrick's Day*, for example, is both an English soldier and an Irish gentleman. Boucicault is fascinated by the idea of the divided self, and uses it in many of his plays, giving it a sinister dimension in his creation of the Hardress Cregan/Danny Mann duality.

The urge to transformation is not confined to single individuals; the playwrights apply

it to the whole of Anglo-Irish society. Philips and Shadwell repeatedly urge their society towards recreating itself in a more inclusive mode. They were engaged on what Raymond Gillespie describes as 're-imagining Ireland'³ as the nation of 'Hibernia'. The manifestation of the Gaelic-Hibernian characters on the eighteenth-century stage produced a bifurcated response among the Protestant Irish. At one level they resented it, at another, they were being moved to accept the transformation and inclusion of the other tradition on the island. Macklin's self-made leading characters, Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan, Murrough O'Dogherty, Sir Pertinax MacSycophant, have all achieved a personal metamorphosis, as did Macklin himself. Macklin continues the venerable tradition of trying to forge the conscience of the race by urging his countrymen, in *The Man of the World*, not to fall into the Scottish trap of hypocritical patriotism, but, in *The True-born Irishman*, to cleave to practical works of national improvement.

O'Keeffe and Knowles also re-imagined society; they continued to exploit the political power of the Irish theatre that had been articulating alternative realities for two centuries. O'Keeffe subtly supported the egalitarian ideas of the French Revolution. Rover refashions the whole of his known world in *Wild Oats*, and Felix creates a brief economic utopia in *The Wicklow Mountains*. The personal re-fashioning has shifted its centre of gravity so far over the course of the eighteenth century that the sham-gentlemen of Shadwell are replaced by the sham-peasants of O'Keeffe.

Knowles is the most open of the playwrights in his commitment to changing the world. He devoted his entire work to 'opening the future'⁴ and presenting alternative views of personal morality and societal structures that overturned the aristocratic centralism of

³ Raymond Gillespie, 'Political ideas and their social contexts', *Political Thought in Seventeenth Century Ireland*, p. 123.

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 187

the first half of the nineteenth century.

This urge to give the Irish people a sense of their own worth and to lead them to better things underlies Boucicault's letter to Disraeli urging him to implement in the political world the pardon and reconciliation he had already imagined in *The Shaughraun*. It surfaces most powerfully in the aspirational and visionary values encoded in the Nationalist Melodramas and actively decoded and rehearsed at every performance in the Queen's Theatre by the emerging Nationalist proletariat. These plays perform what Frantz Fanon calls the writer's duty, to kindle and nourish the hope and expectation of national freedom. P.J. Bourke also shows to the oppressed people their lives transformed by the aspiration to freedom.

Within this urge to refashion the personal and political self are subsumed all the hopeful imposters of Shadwell, all the self-made characters of Macklin, (including himself), the revolutionary regenerate Rover, the Irish duality of Sheridan and the alternative selves of Boucicault. All are instances of personal or collective change by the exercise of the imagination.

This urge to transformation indicates a personal and societal dissatisfaction and colonial unease among those who wrote for the theatre. In this aspiration, the playwrights from Philips onwards were out of step and consistently subversive of their society and opposed to the established authorities, who clung to the exclusive vision of 'Hibernia', and resisted any further integration or change.

Dramatically speaking, women are the agents of change in this society. The portrayal of women is consistent throughout the period. They are characterized from the start by a refusal to be cowed or bound by male ideas, and a tendency to be agents rather than patients. They are less hidebound than the men by received ideas of duty or demands of honour.

The first appearance, Marfissa, in *Landgartha*, sets the pattern, skirt tucked up, wearing spurs and a sword, and dancing the Whip of Dunboyne merrily. The girls in *St. Stephen's Green* flatly refuse to accept London ways or fads, embodying the free spirits of the Irish Ascendancy females. Shadwell shows us a wide gallery of women, the dominant characteristic of whom is independence of mind, leading to independence of action — 'gay, spirited Irish women'.⁵ In matrimonial matters, the men appear fools beside them, veering between mercenary bargaining and ridiculously elevated rhetoric, which the women treat with contempt. Social mobility in Shadwell is vested in his women, who end the plays by marrying upward on the social ladder, achieving societally the superiority they already display personally. According to Shadwell, the only thing preventing women from overrunning this society is lack of monetary resources; in every other respect, they outclass the men.

Shadwell and Philips go so far as to adopt the Gaelic convention of identifying the heroines of their history plays with the country itself. Shadwell proposes to his opposing factions a wedding that unites the two races on the island in equality and harmony.

Knowles takes a Victorian domestic view of women, helpless in the public world but dominating the private, and through that dominance educating and ultimately

⁵ Shadwell, *The Sham Prince*, IV. p. 235.

controlling the public actions of the men. It is very clear in Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, whose teaching sends her sons out as a sacrifice for the common good, and ends the play as an indomitable domestic figure in the final tableau defying the public men who invade her realm.

O'Keeffe shows few Ascendancy women but when he does, such as Helen Donnybrook in *The Wicklow Mountains*, she is well able to practise deception to get her own way. Upper-class women have a cavalier way with the truth: it is not sacrosanct when their own interests are involved. Boucicault takes a dim view of his Ascendancy men as rigid and stupid, but values the women much more highly. They are flexible and resourceful, ready to bend the rules, occasionally ruthless, like Mrs. Cregan, in *The Colleen Bawn*, or willing to lie in a good cause, like Claire Ffolliott, in *The Shaughraun*, or Sarah Curran in *Robert Emmet*. The men are hampered by the ethics of the means, the women look to the end results, and bend the means accordingly. Even to so hostile a writer as PJ Bourke, the last vitality of the class survives in its women: his Lady Nugent in *For the Land She Loved*, is a vibrant, scheming, resourceful villain.

Rather than reaching out to the rest of the country, the image of the Ascendancy, both on stage and in reality, is one of performance: they are the actors, the rest of the country is the audience. Play-acting is a constant theme and activity of these gentlemen and ladies in the entire body of early Irish plays. They are full of sham-gentlemen who pose the question for the audience: What is a gentleman? Especially an Irish gentleman? How does the imposter differ from the real thing and how do you spot him? One aspect of the colonial dialogue is that the imposters are usually English, and accepted by the

anglophiles in Irish society. A corollary to the foundation myth of the first colonists as crusading civilizers of a barbaric wilderness is the assumption of the superiority of all things English. Surprisingly, from an early date in Irish drama, the superiority of English ways and things is under attack. In a colony, it is to be expected that the values, creations and symbols of the motherland would be preferred, but those who take this line are consistently lampooned, and the sensibility strengthens over time until it is completely overthrown by an assertion that declares all things Irish are best, by Mary O'Brien in *The Fallen Patriot*, and by Macklin in *The True-born Irishman* and *Love a la Mode*.

We can see in Shadwell and Philips the denial of English superiority, in Philips the resurrection of Gaelic aristocracy, and in both, the emergence of an awareness of merging with the other tradition. The success of the Anglo-Irish stage gentleman, O'Blunder and his successors, shows a tentative acceptance by the respectable bourgeois gentry of the more colourful, disreputable tradition. True gentlemen and ladies can be identified on stage by their *générosité*, but in eighteenth century Ireland, the Protestant establishment was bemused by the revived Gaelic upper class, who had remade themselves religiously and linguistically, by adopting the religion and language of the victors.

Language is often the ground on which the debate is conducted. The Irish characters who are laughed for their inability to speak proper English, as Teague in *The Committee* (1661), give way to those who can expertly manipulate the English language and employ it to dominate English society.

The resourceful Irish gentlemen in England in the plays of the eighteenth century – O'Blunder, O'Flaherty, O'Brallaghan, O'Trigger, and O'Connor – all display this linguistic superiority. The brogue and blunder of which they were accused by contemporary Anglo-Ireland is almost non-existent; the parts are written for the most part in clear English with 'now and then a touch upon the brogue'.⁶ The characters have the conviction of speaking English better than the English themselves, as O'Dogherty asserts in *True-born Irishman*, and they hold in contempt the attempts of the English at their own language. Macklin overturns accepted ideas completely by insisting that the Irish spoken in Ireland, 'our plain old Irish English',⁷ is superior to all other variants, a signifier of the excellence of Irish bourgeois society and the revived Gaelic families that are now such an important part of it. The conviction goes deep and lasts long: in Falconer's *Eileen Oge* (1871), the Irish peasant characters think the Cockney servant should be 'hanged for the murder of the King's English'.⁸ In a forerunner of the Irish literary style, Knowles in *William Tell* takes an egalitarian view of language and allows his peasants to express themselves poetically.

Language is one of the main symbols in this transformation of the Anglo-Irish mind-set, but others play a part as well. Certain symbols of Irishness are rejected, some embraced. The Irish language is nowhere to be seen except in the insults Macklin levels at his uncomprehending audience. Out too go such cultural identifiers as potatoes, cabins,

⁶ Richard Cumberland, 'Prologue' to *The West Indian*, in *The Beggar's Opera and Other Eighteenth Century Plays*, p. 343.

⁷ Charles Macklin, *The True-born Irishman*, II. p.111.

⁸ *Eileen Oge*, I. 1. French's Acting Edition (London: Samuel French, n.d.), p. 5.

whiskey, brogues and brogue, to be replaced by ideas of cultural refinement, ancient culture, music, and linguistic expertise. In the mind of the Anglo-Irish, the barbarism that Shirley portrayed is dislodged by the mediaeval splendour of Knowles and the classical balance of Philips, Shadwell, Dobbs and Howard. The Irish landscape is appropriated; the wheel has turned and the savage country that the sixteenth-century colonists tried to control and tame into a quiescent garden now exhibits in its natural wild state as an active part of their heritage, an expression of their soul. O'Keeffe creates settings that partake of Rousseau or Wordsworth and influence his characters; Knowles in *William Tell* creates a diorama that acts on the unconscious minds of the characters and inspires them to freedom; Boucicault uses landscape as a character in itself. It affects the characters, determines action, and occasionally takes an active part.

Knowles always favoured abstractions over people, but in the Nationalist Melodramas, abstract symbolization becomes the norm. Since Farquhar, a strand in the Irish theatre dealt with the problems of *homo economicus*, but now his rise and success are overthrown by political shibboleths. The unifying symbols of harp and shamrock, used by Sheridan and Knowles, or the landscape in Boucicault or O'Keeffe, are replaced by 'freedom', 'the flag' and 'independence'. Politics, in Irish drama, has become pre-eminent over economics, abstractions over material concerns.

Few of these plays are of any great literary merit, but they are often of a high theatrical standard, in the days when writers were of little importance. Yet it is possible to look on the period, with its repeated themes, patterns, preoccupations, as a slow-moving school of Irish drama. Irish theatre was always noted for the actors it produced, but its writers

are characterized as an occasional genius and a pack of scribblers. But these writers did their share to transform the theatre, in Ireland and abroad.

Orrery and Katherine Philips introduced Rhyming Heroic Tragedy to the English theatre, and applied political drama to an Irish situation. Farquhar refocused the drama away from the nobility on to the lower gentry and the upper middle-class. Philips and Shadwell started the personification of the country in their female heroines. O'Keeffe pioneered the shorter play and brought Irish plays and concerns to an international audience. Knowles revived tragedy, reinvented stage presentation to incorporate the action of the play within a diorama of staged tableaux, and gave peasant characters the gift of poetry. Boucicault created an audience, and appropriated the theatre for Ireland; he investigated the workings of the unconscious mind, and developed the spectacular theatre to its highest pitch. Whitbread, Bourke, and the Nationalist Melodramas brought revolutionary zeal leaping off the stage into the auditorium and into the consciousness of the nation.

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